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THE Hudson Review

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To Our Readers

We are pleased to announce that **HAYDEN CARRUTH,** an Advisory Editor of THE HUDSON REVIEW, has received the 1978 Lenore Marshall Poetry Prize for his collection, *Brothers, I Loved You All.* The Prize, sponsored by the New Hope Foundation, is given to "the outstanding book of poems published in the United States." This year Mr. Carruth has also been awarded a Guggenheim Fellowship and received the Shelley Memorial Award "in recognition of the poet's entire work."

Due to increased publication and postal costs, THE HUDSON REVIEW must raise its subscription rates. Beginning with the Spring 1980 issue, one-year subscriptions will be $12.00, two-year $22.00, and three-year $32.00. We urge our readers to take out two- or three-year subscriptions now, at the current rate. Your orders will be honored until April 1st.

We call the attention of our readers to the fact that our summer moratorium has been extended by one month. From now on, unsolicited manuscripts will not be read during the months of June, July, August, and September.

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Scripture of the Blind

By Yánnis Rítsos. Translated from the Greek, with an Introduction, by Kimon Friar and Kostas Myrsiades. One of the most distinguished poets of modern Greece, Yánnis Rítsos has been celebrated throughout the world, and has eight times been nominated for the Nobel Prize. Published for the first time in any language, the poems in this bilingual edition were written during a two-month period, between September 28 and November 28, 1972, at the height of the oppression and degradation of the junta years. $20.00.

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The Cretan Glance

The World and Art of Nikos Kazantzakis

By Morton P. Levitt. With a Foreword by Kimon Friar. "The Cretan Glance" was Kazantzakis's figure for the "heroic and playful eyes" with which man may, "without hope yet without fear," confront the abyss and find the determination with which to continue his struggle toward inevitable failure and spiritual liberation. In his critical reading of Kazantzakis's fiction, Professor Levitt traces the evolution of this ethical-aesthetic view, beginning with the most historical of his novels, *Freedom and Death*, and concluding with the monumental epic *The Odyssey: A Modern Sequel.* $12.50

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Essays on Holocaust Literature and Jewish Fate

By Edward Alexander. An examination of the works of Israeli and American Jewish writers since World War II and their attempts to cope with the enormity of the crime perpetrated and the suffering endured during the terrible and systematic destruction by the Nazis of the Jews of Europe. The recurrent themes of this absorbing and impassioned book are the incredibility of the Holocaust, its impact on the covenantal structure of Jewish religion, and the rival claims of Israeli and American Jewry to inheritance of the culture destroyed in Europe. Among the writers discussed are Abba Kovner, I. B. Singer, Nelly Sachs, Saul Bellow, and Chaim Grade. $15.00.

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R. G. VLIET

Passage

I

Out of the cracked ice, the blue
crevasse: I'm a polar pup on a drifting
floe.
What is this light through drawn
brown shades?
Bundled like a bear
and put to nap in the cold sun,
or with that little waddler my play-
mate in snowsuits and knitted scarfs
and mitts, tumbling on icy grass,
trying to twist our unlimber necks
like winter sparrows—across the street
the black box was brought down
the stairs, the wooden stairs, the stairs
with flaky gray paint.
Puddles
from wet arctics on a kitchen floor.

II

THE MINIÉ BALL

Scraped it up out of leaf mold
years ago, its shape retentive
in savagery, in rotted sticks and leaves.
Blunted tip, white jacket
of corrosion. Washed in the creek, cleaned
of its debris, it lay like a lead suppository
in a boy's hand. The

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leaf-filled
trenches
outside Alexandria. Beetles scurry
through the leaves, *tick tick.* A golden
turtle hisses, mound of hieroglyphs,
fat claws pinched between plastron
and carapace, a piece of bloody raspberry
in its beak. Here, wheeling the 12-pound
Napoleon into place—
a button drops
from the blue sleeve.

I think often
of them, with their lithe bones.

III

All night long, on that lava coast,
the suck and roar of the sea, on the other
side of the screen, boom and hiss
upward through spout holes: spray
on my thin blankets. Then, beneath sleep,
the blue moan of the desurgent demon,
shriek of stranded limpets and pooled
fishes. Mornings the reef rose,
a daily Atlantis, and the narrow lawn
was grizzled with salt rime. The night
mist dripped from the eaves. I ran
through the village with Sa'ii, under the milky
breadfruit trees, past the thatched *fales*
where the chiefs and their *siva* queens
still slept, huge brown larvae
in mosquito net cocoons. The air
was smoky from the fires in *umus.* We stoned
breakfast crabs at the river's edge.
Out on the reef we watched women's fists
pull obstinate octopi out of holes.
Under the shelved coral sea cucumbers

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withered like wrinkled penises and squirted.
Schools of zebra fish darted
in the shoals. I built a boat
of tar and tin roofing. Myself
and a dozen other masters of the sea
rode the blue combers where they whistled
in through a break in the reef. Below,
the sunlight shifted from cobalt to green.
On the shore the white mission
stared. The green hills hovered around.
That was the sun of 1939.
One afternoon a German submarine
nosed into the bay, diesels muttering,
sailors crisp in their white uniforms.

IV

Genesis IV. 8

The flicker in the sourgum tree
at Cherry Point
has its eye on me. It circles
like a squirrel around the tree.
At Cherry Point soldiers with fat
(turtles down sand black with rotted
leaves scuttle for water,
odor
of rotted leaves and tidal trash)
pockets on their pantlegs splash
to the beach. Rifles and netted helmets
rattle the holly
at Cherry Point
at Cherry Point
tap
tap
tap tap tap.
I hid
all morning long in a pitchpine

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tree, my hands black with resin,
chewing for thirst the bitter needles,
half in fear and half in dreaming
Gretchen with her knobby knees
peeing on pine needles, the down
on her arms and her yellow hair.
Down below two men lay panting
one in tears, throwing off their gear—
"will kill you" "no, I didn't—"
rolled in the hot red dirt.
One screamed. His face went white.
The other dug thumbs at his throat,
lifting and beating his head against a root
until the screams choked, then tottered up
kicked him in the ass. *"Next time*
I'll kill you get the hell up."
(Crushed
holly
crushed
Field
glasses and chrome antennae, quirt
and cowplop hat.
sassafras.)
—The river
writhed in the heat, guns popped
around
at Cherry
"Get that
little bastard down from there!"

*

Movies were free and the camp commandant
issued the regulation Christmas parties.
My brother with the runny nose and close-
cropped hair followed me everywhere,
tick on my tail, until one day
I led him deep in the woods to the six
Indian graves and left him there

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beating on a tin drum *tap*
tap tap. He was shy as the strangest
stranger after that.
Circling on a mat,
coiled hair in their armpits, chins
dripping sweat, relique dogtags
jingling from their necks—
the fat
sergeant hollers. Those with knives attack.
Leverage applied to elbow and wrist,
backs slap onto the mat.

. . . rattle
the holly . . .

White
rump, red
nape, yellow wing

—with
my B. B. gun I shot the—

hold the bloody mess in my hands.

V

Twice I've been to the ocean.
In morning
light layered as mother-of-pearl
the blue heave hissed and broke,
littering the air. Lathered with foam
a green undertow
swept toward me and clearer fingers
pried sand from under my knees.
Curlews screamed overhead. Go
In, my father said. He wore

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cap and jacket against the cold.
I balked and wept, my small
body summed up in nakedness, in elemental
fear, thin
arms drawn across my chest, blue
fingertips, blue penis the size
of a thimble. Spray laced my neck.

The second time a woman led me.
Under a stone sky, in emerald
air, no bird, no sound, no motion
but my own trembling:
love could have led me anywhere.
The pale, thin horizon was a ring
around us and ringed the dark sea.
We sat in weeds and sandburs
far up on the shore. You
were beautiful,
as you were meant to be, the small
oval face and slight body—
Ariel's spirit but Miranda's eyes.
No,
whatever you meant, the passion
was in me.
A long, withdrawing roar,
mudflats and naked pilings: the huge
wave seismic out of Asia
blotted the horizon,
grew in its
advance,
dragging the undertow,
its soaring crest
whistling like the Erinyes.
We
scrambled up the bluff. But I
as the curve lisped before annihilation
looked back into
my black soul terrible with power,
the god Eros singing in the sea.

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VI

RUNNING, AND HOW I LEARNED TO FLY

Now, after surgeons' knives, cobalt's
basilisk stare, the destroyed blood,
I dream of running. Rounding the curve,
my breaths relaxed and fat, strength
gathering as it never does in fact,
once more I pull ahead of the runner
from Houston. I did one day
of crucifixive breath,
locked thighs and knotted back,
breaking through the wall of iron victory
into the arms, nearly, of death. But now
his is a complementary flesh, our pain
joint animal joy, motion
the very orison of being. I am
the god of the nine-foot stride.
I learned
to fly of necessity. *Big ears!* they yelled
the first day I got on the schoolbus,
sandwich and two milk pennies
in my fist. Whereupon I climbed back
down, hiked my feet off the ground,
and in a comfortable sitting position
paddled my way to school. Got there first,
besides. From that it was an easy matter
to glide pterodactyl-like from roofs
and trees, then to grow feathers and fly.

I have come too close to the sun
of disease! I want
the joy of running, the quick foot,
blood taste in my mouth: resurrection's
hot flowers!
Sleet ticks
on the window, and again I feel the nausea
lift its curdled head. Outside

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in the dark the numb, bent trees
explode, shattering ice onto the crusted
snow. A gun cracks. In the green
heat of my sickness I run, this time
past dusty leaves, up an incline
on a dry, country road.

VII

Happy girl with the goldenrod hair.

Night cooled,
pinching the air,
pinched a blood red moon
out of cap rock: the deer
were garnet-eyed.
Sangre de Cristo.
Two granite backbones fell
to the desert sea, deliquescent valley
in between, and for three hundred miles
schools of mesas like lesser whales
hove from the swell. The first lights
blinked in Cimarron.

"Those
who are separated
by a thousand miles
share the same moon."

*

In your dreams I am in the mountains.
The cabins have stone floors.
Mountains
of loneliness, the summering Herefords, the fox
across the trail.

*

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We walk
by a river, under a later moon,
the ghostly sunfish hovering in the clear
water between weeds, a ghostly bird
piping its fear in a sycamore or cypress,
your hurt face laced
with cypress shadows
wild kisses
O my love
I meant to shape
this poem compose it like a crystal
a garnet for your hair:

your body has been my life.
"My blood
speaks to you in my veins."

Wet mouth
clear-minded eyes
blue, with attitudes of gray
childishly
freckled face
the breast I kiss
like a child, the other you offer me,
belly
'milk white' white
as neck of 16th-century duchess,
wide hips coppery woman-hairs
lovely between thighs.
And you
have wished yourself more beautiful for me!

*

But if ye saw that which no eyes
can see,
the inward beauty of her lively spright,
her shy joy delicate as her wrists,
her strength to love welling like a river,
source inexplicable
shimmering with pebbles,

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her calm mind but in her passions free,
her being grown from early grief
to natural tenderness, then would ye wonder.

*

This is the shirt
my love has made for me,
flowers on the collar
and full sleeves:
plain cloth
smelling of midday sun,
a few
drops of rain on leaves.

*

We both know our deaths. Don't grieve.
Through all time your body
will come to me, the blue eyes,
the quickening heart, the pain
of your dear words
voice
I hear
in the maelstrom.
Forgive me. I
was unworthy, beside your love
my own
the least stain of wetness under stone.

In Hell the mad, pure angels sing.

When
we shall not be
may this song
stonecrop
flower of a small gift
ever cherish thee.

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VIII

The angel, unannounced, arrives. He is here.
Out of what sulfurous depth or center
of light I cannot know, or wait
to know: his first word is the poem.
It sticks to my tongue like a wafer,
transubstantial.
I drive up to a gate.
In the blood of everyday sacrifice a goat
hangs from a live oak. Flies
buzz. The sun pulses overhead.
A woman, whose hair is stringy gray
and face old, cleans the blade
on her apron. With her son we sit
to a dinner of fresh-killed meat,
biscuits and greens.
The angel knows
every sun in the Milky Way.
A river
runs over rocks, clear, and a girl
bright-haired and naked moons
in it. Hoofs splash: she is taken up
into another language, another country.
And Soledad in her grief, and Reyes
come down to his death in a blue norther:
his face is the Mycenaean, hammered
tragic mask.
Behind drawn shades
day by day a quiet despair.
Sunlight on the square is cruel as Tophet.
The silent stars
do not touch our lives, they crown indifferently
the kiss under the lattice, the cries of Gutierrez
burnt alive on a brush pile.
O
be merciful beyond the brief

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rain lily, dark shade
of live oaks, moan of ground dove
in cedar, dear messenger.
I have made
this pipe of a goat's thigh bone
to play on, as I do now.

IX

Light spoke opening like a door
opening like the roof of a house taken away
opening like the top of the night plucked
apart
LIGHT
greater than the sun
or combustion of phosphorus
SPOKE
no other light than its own being
held
then spread exploding like a star
roots: lace: lace lightning: like
a net.

And I saw all things:

those with whiskered snouts/ those
waxing into feathers on their wings/ tails
or no tails/ scaly/ furred
huddled in shells/ claw foot
hoof foot/ paddle foot
no feet/ those that roll into balls
that swim/ that crawl under rocks or are
the rocks themselves/ spin webs
sniff with ferny feelers/ creep
run/ crawl/ see or don't see

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eat the fat of the sun or blood
or leaves or dung/ that sleep in nests
or shut their bone doors/ leaf out
by twos threes sixes nines
or sevens/ flower/ split from pods
crack their bellies/ make milk
breed in dust or ride the clouds
flat noses/ shovel mouths
that sprout branches from their heads
wear spines or are the true
jellies/ grow roots/ nets/ little
bulbed suns:

and my own kind also
thicker
than leaves
those in death and in the deaths to come
each
alone
on the endless plain of time:
EACH ONCE ONCE ONLY.

I saw at a glance the pure
identity of each.

The roothairs of light
touched
all things, all things
blessed equally/linked by light.
Containers of life now or to be
or long since put away
were not ever
put away. Each
was always the eternal being of himself

having once been, to be always

and the innumerable is
one.

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X

AZRAEL

1

At first light,
the darkening hemlocks wet with mist:
annunciations of a wood thrush, water
from a thin-necked bottle. Always near
the ground, it recedes deeper in the woods,
from pubescent viburnum to mountain azalea.

2

We all live
in the same garden, the iris stalks
that squeaked when we pulled them,
the weighted brambles, our hands stained
by raspberries. Sunlight rustles the grass,
and the angel waits with his hands in his lap.

3

What is
this longing that always knew me? A window-
shade trembles. Joy was always
subtle, holding me unawares. Grief
was ecstasy—branch and leaf and the shadow
of leaves. From waste the star grew.

4

Het licht! ¡La luz! I'm a man of rags
sailing under rags coated with tar.

5

My heart,
accept this voyage: a new world
lies beyond. The trades lapse.
Strange birds are in the trees. Eyes
stare from behind salt weeds.
The language is silence, as yours must be.

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LINDA COLLINS

Meditation on Play, Thoughts on Death

FOR YEARS, my son Jacob, who is now twelve, played so hard at dramas of such complexity that when the episode was over he would emerge from his room dampskinned and spent. He and Astrid, friends since they were four, used to plan these afternoons. As they grew older, they would sometimes speak on the telephone: "You bring all your G. I. Joe stuff to my house." Separately they would collect equipment they could see they together might need. Heavy pieces of furniture would be moved by these two small strong children, beds and desks fitted together at right angles over which they fastened the bedspreads and blankets dragged from beds. Mommy, can we use this? Can we take these? The door to the linen closet would be left ajar, the light slanting across the hall; a trail of disturbed wash cloths, pillow cases and pillow feathers led to Jacob's room, where the shades would be drawn and the doors closed. Behind these closed doors they constructed flight decks of carriers and the cockpits of fighter planes to attack enemies entrenched upon Pacific islands in caves of impregnable rock. The skies swarmed, the seas rocked. Glittering metal hung overhead and fell spinning into the ocean upon which, in their tiny craft, Jacob and Astrid slipped between menacing hulls to safety and revenge. From his room emerged murmurs of strategy and shouts of pain, exhortations to courage and wild cries to persuade a lurking spy that forces were on the point of landing on the beaches below. But in fact the children were cut off, threatened by enemies on both sides. The jungles were alive with snipers, unseen rapids roared, beneath leafy camouflage gun muzzles gleamed. One could only hold one's breath, the challenge was so great. A long silent moment of fear acknowledged the extent of the danger. Perhaps there was no hope at all. And then from somewhere unexpected, perhaps through an unnoticed break in the glowering sky, deliverance stood at hand. And all those circling enemies were undone. No one expected so quick a solution. It seemed that the game could have gone on and on. But the moment of utmost strain had borne its own release and all gave way in one triumphant rush.

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Thereupon they would call, "Come. Come. See what we have made," and I would push open the door and in the room which was now orange with late afternoon light, I could smell the sweat of their excitement. "We're in here." Turning back a blanket corner, I saw that there they were together in the back of some cavern in warm darkness. I saw their eyes and their glistening skin. Astrid would sometimes look a bit shy and self-mocking as the shades snapped up and bright winter light fell upon their works, but never Jacob, who would explain with pride that here had lain the console, there the radar screen, that between this point and that electronically sensitive cells—and here he would indicate a little row of worn batteries, or perhaps cans of tomato paste—had transmitted to the space station the locations of those whom they had just now overcome. Sometimes they would look over the battlegrounds and sigh. It was clearly all over. And then they would leave the wreckage and the tumbled sheets and rush to the kitchen to eat big bowls of sweet things and stir up sticky milk drinks.

Well, of course I am telescoping how many afternoons? Many. And as for us with sex, or dinner parties, one time is not always as good as another, so from time to time inspiration failed them. Then Jacob might find that, without knowing how, he had pinched Astrid, or punched her, and she would become silent and her clear face darken and they would have to resort to television and wait until it was time for the visit to be over. But the next time could be the best. Some freshly conceived invention would spring up to urge the two children to valorous acts they had not known even in their dreams, new contraptions of war would push open Jacob's door and proliferate the length of the hall, newly shaped, like Themistocles' wall, of building blocks torn from the ramparts of older fortifications, bastions against an earlier enemy. The convention of privacy was abandoned as the theater of war swept from room to room. They didn't care if I saw them. They didn't care who saw them. They were airborne.

Sometimes, during the week, in preparation, Jacob made armor, weapons ancient or modern, electronic weaponry, or perhaps a crossbow, or simply arrows. But just as often the machinery of war was born in the field, it flew together in Jacob's hand as the need arose. As when some great warrior found his sword struck from his hand, and he stood stockstill helpless watching the blade of his mortal enemy gleam ominously while he could still see the two pieces of his own blade, split and lying in the grass, and then, as though by a miracle, a new spear twinkled in his hand, so for these

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children the speed with which their ordnance was delivered was sometimes dazzling.

Now Astrid was endangered, shipwrecked. Firepower poured from the heavens, thunder rose from the depths of the sea. How could he reach her, with their landing craft hopelessly crippled, great lacey holes blown out of her sides, and the stretch of water between them menacing the sky in angry leaps? But always resourceful, he shouted across to her, and strode to the grove of trees on the finger of land at the end of his island and chopped them down, trimmed the branches, split them into boards and planed them smooth; next he pegged them together and fitted a mast and a rudder. Astrid leaned over from her island to hand him a sheet. "Here, this is for a sail," she said and then stepped back in the shelter of the overhanging cliff. Now the craft was ready. Watchfully he slid her in between the waves, and with cunning steered her from trough to trough. So skillful was he that not a drop of water touched his skin, his mast stood unbroken, his sail stretched untorn. The raft flew between the crests of the waves sending up a spray of foam on each side. A single sea bird skimmed alongside whose wings sometimes touched the surface and then little spurts of water jetted up on either side of him, too. Jacob stood straight and proud, one arm wrapped around the mast, a frown of concentration upon his brow, his eyes sternly alert for trouble. And trouble there was, for a wave rose which confounded all his cunning and lifted the raft as though it were no heavier than a leaf. It lifted raft and rider into the sky and separated one from the other. They spun apart and twisted in the roaring air until the wind dropped for a moment and they fell like two gannets into the sea. Astrid stood up and tried to guide the swimmer through the storm. "Here, here," she shouted over the shrieking wind and thumping surf as he tried to raise his head above the waves to find a place on the shore where he could drag himself to land and not be crushed against the rocks. But salt stung his eyes and green waves hid the land. Splinters of his little craft appeared and disappeared in the heaving sea. "Here, here," cried Astrid in alarm and crawled on hands and knees as far as she dared on the treacherous rocks to reach out a hand to Jacob whom she slowly and with many a near mishap pulled out of the water. He lay on the ground and gasped for breath. She saw his briny hair, his wild eyes and his stern mouth. "It could have been terrible," she said. "You could have drowned."

Or, it could be night. Jacob and Astrid, spies, dressed in black,

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were creeping through the damp woods, past black tree trunks and gleaming wreckage of airplanes, past the blasted frame of a small tank here, there its cover sunk into the soft wet leaves, and everywhere fallen comrades. But no time now to dwell upon grief, to linger in sorrow. Time now only to look sharp, to know the dark like the animals, to turn to any sound a wolf 's ear, to see with the staring eyes of the cat. Silence. Silence and cunning. One must not even whisper. In the zone of silence only gestures are permitted.

Scouting ahead, where the trees broke and the marsh began, Jacob peered with watchful slits of eyes into the dark line of swamp grasses. He saw nothing, but he knew that the creatures of the marsh were watching him. Tense herons blinked and ducks paddled out from the reeds. Angry swans stretched forward their long necks. The night world was uneasy, as he was, waiting. Something was about to happen. What was it? He looked back to see Astrid pointing straight up and with her other arm waving him back to her. For an instant he hesitated, uncertain whether or not to relinquish to her his accustomed managerial prerogative, for his own drama had not quite crystallized, but she was waving insistently and so he returned to her side and looked up to see traces of pale flares tumble from star to star in the night sky and fade into weak lines. These faltering lines marked the east and the west, the north and the south, all the starry quarters of the night, but in the center of the sky, spreading over the moon and her pulsing light, little bursts of darkness puffed noiselessly. Almost immediately it was completely dark, but both children knew that slowly descending upon them were the hundreds and hundreds of parachutes of the enemy.

Plans formed in their minds. Their thoughts raced. The lure of danger, the thrill of the battle to come, pride in their skill, in their loyalty, stirred them. Now they were in for it. This was the real thing. What to do? To flee? To hide? But that's not what they were here for.

In the silence, as the parachutists floated toward them, there sounded all at once a terrible squeal and then silence again and then the cry of the heron, and the flapping of heavy wings, and cries of birds together and separately, the brassy sounds of outrage and distress. Against all that racket the vow of military silence no longer needed to be observed, and the children drew close to one another in the shelter of a great oak tree. Are we to die now? they asked one another. Here? At the edge of the great swamp where

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our bodies will fall to be nibbled by the fishes and nipped by crocodiles? Is this the end of it all? Is this the meaning of all our struggles, all the times we thought of a plan, all the mazes we found our way out of, the ambushes we outflanked, the tricks we outschemed? Has all our valour and wit only brought us to this dreadful end? Better to have gone down with our companions in a hail of bullets holding upright our country's flag with our last ounce of strength, than be strangled silently here in the dark by some parachutist whose face we cannot see even if only to mock him in his triumph. Astrid took Jacob's two hands in hers and they looked long and hard at one another for they could now see despite the extreme darkness. From the sky above they heard the creaking of harnesses and the straining of cloth. Now they were in for it. Now it was up to them. This was the moment they had trained themselves for, the test they had come all this way to meet. They had not known what form it would take, whether their trial would be by water or fire, by night or day, whether they would confront it armed or empty-handed, but they were confident that once they set out, comradely and with stout hearts, sooner or later their chance would come. Suddenly, when you aren't looking up, it comes out of the sky; when you are squinting at the far mountains, the first ships of the armada creep over the horizon behind your back, and when you turn around and see them, your heart pounds and your hands get cold, but what happens then is up to you.

One time, Astrid was wounded. There was no blood to be seen but they both had heard something crack. The vasty polar outreaches stretched away in all directions. Freezing wind drove the snow in slanting lines between their anxious faces. Astrid fell back against the snowbank. Her face was pale and she kept her eyes fixed upon Jacob's face. "I think I'm wounded really badly," she grunted. "I don't think I can go on. Maybe you should leave me here." The white snow was grayer now and was falling faster and more thickly. The wind screamed and the dogs muttered and circled around the sleds, eager to speed on. There was snow on their snouts. It was clear that the cold and the snow excited them. They snorted and sneezed and shook their heads to get the snow off their ears. They pulled at their leashes and padded as far as their harness would let them toward the great white distance. The line between sky and land was blotted away. The glittering cascades of ice which only moments ago had offered promise of shelter and threat of ambush were gone. Only snow. Soft dull snow every-

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where. And wind. And cold. Jacob knew that one should never lie down in the snow. He knew that he could not leave Astrid in the snow. He knew that that way lay death. She would freeze to death in the snow. Lying under the cutting wind, how long could she last? All their ammunition was on the dog sled. It would have to go. The dogs could not pull the sled burdened with Astrid and the rifles both. It was too much. The guns would have to be unloaded. He could come back for them later, when he had got her to a doctor. Astrid was watching him with troubled eyes. "I'm sorry," she murmured. "Leave me. I'll be all right." Impossible, he thought, seeing her there, trying to drag herself onto her good side. With furious sudden energy flowing in his body he lifted the heavy oblong ammunition boxes from the sled and set them neatly down in the snow. He took off his furlined parka and spread it fur side up on the sled, and with strength and power sent to him by the great goddess he bent and lifted his wounded comrade and gently laid her, whose anxious eyes had never left his face, upon the furry couch. She never once moaned even when he had to move her dangling leg, but when she was at last stretched out on the sled, she shuddered with relief at being so still and being able to take her eyes away from him and just look up at the cottony snow as he trotted back and forth straightening the harness lines and speaking quickly in a low tone to the dogs, clearing the blades of the runners of thick dirty clogs of ice, and laying the reins out straight in a semicircle like the ribs of a fan. Then he came back to her and put the reins into her hands in a bunch; the leather was dark from the sweat of his hands. Now the dogs were snuffing and whimpering. Each one stood in his place. Jacob brushed from the sled the snow which had fallen on it while he had been working. He brushed away the snow which had fallen upon Astrid's body and hair, and then he climbed onto the sled and drew over them both the rugs of animal skins which were piled at their feet, fur rugs of lynx and seal and polar bear, and then he too lay back. Side by side the children lay together in the sleigh gazing up at the sky which was dark and white at the same time. Muffled by the falling snow so that it seemed more an echo than a call, they heard the resonant cry of the snow goose and then directly overhead the rumble of the wingbeats of the heavy birds. Unseen they passed overhead beating their way through the snowy night. It would snow for ever and ever. Astrid then gave the reins a smart snap and the dogs howled with joy and with one concerted effort dislodged the sled from its

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icy mooring. The children could feel the jerks and tugs of their starting up through their heels and the backs of their legs, their buttocks and shoulder blades, and through the backs of their skulls. It was a little dizzying to lie there so still not even seeing the dogs, only the sky, while every bump and pull was received in their bodies.

Finally they each felt at the same moment the great smoothing out of it all as the dogs increased their speed and the jerks and skids evened out into trembles and a smooth swinging as the ecstatic dogs made their way over the icy crust faster and faster until it seemed to the children lying there with their eyes staring straight up that they had left the land entirely and were rising to meet the snow and the vague pale colors which pulsed dimly everywhere in the sky.

All right. For seven or eight years they played together in this fashion. It seemed remarkable to me. Not the fact that they played at war and danger, after all that in itself is usual for children; but the profusion of their inventions bespoke powers which awed me. Who would not have envied them? And when the play was done and all those towering constructions became merely chairs piled on tables, with what delicious ease did they abandon the field to loll about languorously in the kitchen eating cookies and laughing.

As I said, Jacob now is twelve. He studies Latin and struggles with the violin. He has immense black hockey skates. At night he wears something to bed called a night arch to urge back his front teeth. Astrid has braces and breasts and has grown as tall as a small woman. One day, recently, Jacob said to me, I remember Astrid's teeth when she was little. They were so tiny and cute. At once I could see those minute brilliant white points in her beautiful mouth, spaced with an architectural perfection, quite far apart, each one placed just so on the ridge of her gum. I was struck that he could remember how she looked so long ago. I had thought that for a child the world is changeless. I wouldn't have thought that children notice one another grow any more than a child notices himself growing. With no sense of change there could be no place for nostalgia to flourish. But I look about and see change in every quarter. In the strange film on the dog's eye and in the cracked bindings of books I think of as new, just bought, as well as in the cracks and films on faces I see across the room or in the mirror. What I mean is that I am growing old and I cannot forget it for a

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minute. But when Jacob spoke with nostalgia for Astrid's long-gone little teeth I felt distressed and I wanted to stand between him and such thoughts. I wanted to stop up those cracks which can at any moment widen into great rifts through which I can see the shifting sands below. At the same time I wanted to conceal my distress, as though there was something unseemly about it. It's one thing to smile and wave as the plane taxis to the far runway; fears can be dissimulated to some degree, anxieties can be masked. But I want to conceal from my son what even Thetis could not conceal from hers: what Jacob seems already to know. Because yesterday after he had walked Astrid to the bus stop and waited with her in the steely blue afternoon, Jacob stood at my study door with cheeks glorious and eyes a bit red-rimmed from the cold. Despite his raging cheeks he looked serious, even a bit burdened. I turned off my typewriter. "It was no good. It was no good last time either," he said.

He came in and sat opposite me, frowning and determined, with the faintest overlay of the theatrical, which in no way detracted from the gravity his face and voice bore. He said he couldn't play any more, not only could he not play with Astrid, but he couldn't even play with boats in the bathtub. He said he had gotten to be like everyone else who could only play games which come in boxes, games with spinners. Spinners and pieces you move about on a board. He said he was getting to be like all the children he knew who were always collecting things. That's all they wanted to do. Collect things, like stamps or rocks, and sort them and put them in boxes, or things like baseball cards and keep them in bundles with thick rubber bands around their middles, or things like matchbooks or comic books or bottle caps or coins. Then they trade these to one another, or they go to the stamp store or the coin store or the comic book store and buy more. He said that last year he and Astrid had noticed that the game was all talking and let's do this and you be that, and it had no action, that somehow just before they were going to get up from their planning and props to really play, when the fortifications were all in place and the guns ready and the radar screens twisting, something would happen to them and they just couldn't start. They could only talk. And he had thought it was all over. But then there had been some sort of a reprieve, a remission, and for a year they had played more brilliantly, more feverishly, than ever. Tundras had been vaster with

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snowstorms more blinding, enemies more cunning, the children themselves had fashioned more dashing uniforms and had extricated themselves from more desperate situations than they earlier ever had imagined. But now it was no good. And it wouldn't be again. He knew that. His voice suddenly thickened and his eyes showed tears. It's sad, he said.

Next he said that he could remember when he was little and happy. What do you remember? I asked, and he answered, Running on the campus at night. I pictured him when he was four, with red, red cheeks, in the winter, with his nose running a little bit, and it growing dark with the lights coming on on the campus walks, maybe the Christmas lights are on here and there, and a few stars and a weak moon, and along the paths from building to building, between the monuments and plaques and sculptures, Jacob is running and running.

How can I describe how it really was? Jacob came over to where I was sitting behind the desk and rested against me. I felt his warmth as I had on the day he was born and they laid him on my belly for me to feel him and him, I suppose, to feel me. Now I felt his weight and his heart beating. He drew a long breath and laid his head upon my shoulder. I didn't want to put my arms around him to comfort him, because I thought that might indicate to him that I too perceived the moment to be heavy with a grief against which the two of us could only wrap our arms around one another, a grief so profound that only our bodies' warmth stood between us and desolation. I did feel as though we mourned the death of someone, as though we stood together before a monstrous stone, a tomb. I thought of Thetis, who said, as Achilles howled at the death of Patrocles, turning to the nymphs who filled the silvery cave at the bottom of the sea,

> "Hear, sister Nereids, so you all may know well
> what pain is in my heart.
> I am Misfortune, oh I have borne the noblest to misfortune,
> for I bore a son strong and perfect, among heroes a hero,
> and he grew tall as a tree, I raised him like a prize blossom
> and I sent him away on the curved ships into Ilion
> to fight the Trojans. And never again shall I receive him
> when he shall have made his way homeward to his father's house.

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As long as he lives and sees the light of the sun, so long shall he
suffer, nor can I do anything to help him,
even though I go to him."

And at the same time I wanted to laugh, because he looked so tragic, and there is something grotesque about the sight of a child oppressed with an old man's vision. I wanted to laugh because I was upset. I felt tragic and oppressed, myself; I didn't want him to know it, though. I didn't want him to know that I can't see what replaces childhood either. I didn't laugh, though. I didn't say anything yet; my mind was racing, calculating, but he felt something, because he said, "It's sad for you, too. You don't have a baby any more." But that was not what affected me. Nor was I affected very much by the thought that he will indeed one day go away to Troy and never come back to his father's house. That is true, of course, but that is another story. The splinter that had dislodged itself from the ordinary and was working its way into my heart was the thought that he wasn't a blessed creature, that his magic had deserted him, that he had turned this way and that to find it again, but it had eluded him. And in coming to tell me about it he was acknowledging to himself that it was indeed gone and not to be found again.

What had I thought? That he would dart here and there forever, escaping thus the net which had now fallen upon him, as it must on the best as well as on the others? Was it because he had played so brilliantly and for longer than the allotted playtime that I had indulged in thoughts of a kind of immortality for him? Mothers do just that over their sons, you will say. Yes, they do, you are right. Parents dream of tasting a kind of liberty in the joys they lust after for their children. I want to admit there is something embarrassing, even shameful, here. Here are things about which we cannot speak. We all move together in one inexorable swerve toward the end of our lives. We bear to one another different relations. To one, I am mother; to another, child, or wife, or friend. Some are of my age, we are agemates and so look the same distance back, and see the distance ahead shortening by the same degree, we are bound to one another by virtue of the fact that we stand on parallel rungs of our particular ladders, we understand that what is true for one of us is likely to be true for another, whether or not we dare to touch upon these facts aloud. Then there are those younger than ourselves, our friends whose youth we may envy, pity, despise, depend-

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ing upon what we think they may know about these matters. And then there are our children, whose upward curve warms and chills us, whom we would like to exhort to pleasure and to whom we would call out at the same time, *Memento mori.* No, not that. Surely not that. We would never have them think on death, nor would we have them see how we are ourselves aging, how we are the moribund at the wedding feast. But still we would warn them unbeknownst, so that in the midst of their shouts and games, with cheeks feverish with joy, and lips parted to sing, suck, lick, or bite at the apple of life, they should still remember, and prepare, and bear for ever the name of their lord and master, death, before their eyes, upon their sleeve.

"It's sad for you, too, because you don't have a baby any more," he said again to bring me back to him.

He sat down in the chair across from me.

"I wish I didn't have to grow up," he said.

There was a silence. I didn't know what would happen next. Then I told him that for adults there were pleasures to replace the ones children had. What were they? I said there was tennis. And skiing. Sports. Concerts. And travel. Cathedrals. Museums. And love, and having children of one's own. And I said that for some people work, and the effort and concentration of work, was a source of happiness. I said quite a few other things. I can't remember exactly what else I said. He did not ask me whether or not my work provided me with what we were talking about. But by now, for one reason or another, he was no longer pursuing the subject. His eyes were no longer tearful, but neither were they searching my own for some answer to these questions. He fiddled a little bit with the things on my desk, and I told him not to, and then he went off.

But when he was gone I felt quite uncomfortable. I wanted to call him back. But to say what? He would probably have come back in looking stern, and asked, "What? What do you want?" And what was it I would say I wanted? I didn't want to have to detain someone eager to be off to the next thing while I tried to put into words for him something I couldn't even put into words for myself. I didn't want to submit to his gaze. I turned on my typewriter and felt it hum under my fingers and I adjusted the margin release and thought with relief that I would at least get on with what I had been doing, but the moment faded and the humming turned into a buzz and I had to turn it off.

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Outside it was neither afternoon nor night. A heavy uniform dull blue light hung in the sky. The buildings were this color, although a little duller than the sky. So also, but darker still, was the pavement and the sidewalks. Except in the far distance where a remnant of afternoon gleamed a certain yellow green, the whole world was uniform, dull, blue. I thought I would go out. I thought I could go out to buy a bottle of wine for dinner. Or something sweet, something chocolate, perhaps, for dessert.

In the bakery everything was brilliant and moist. Glass shelves bore glowing little tarts. Lovely glistening hemispheres of apricot rose out of pale custards. The warm air was thick with vanilla and the choking fragrance of butter. Women in furs and brown gloves reached for their white boxes of desserts. I waited and saw myself reflected in the mirrors and then reached over the counter for my white box tied with a thin red string in a loop for my finger.

But then I couldn't go straight home. Awkward as it was to walk with the bottle of wine in its paper bag under my arm and the pastry dangling from one finger, still I walked and kept on walking. I was cold and getting colder. At the park entrance I stopped, and waited, but then I went in.

By now all the blue had drained from the sky. In certain spots old snow lay on the ground. I looked to see any reddening of the bare branches, any swelling at the tips of the twigs, any signs of spring at all. The reservoir was framed with ice. I stood beside the frozen water holding the bottle of wine against my chest.

On the blackening water I saw a dead swan lying. Quite near to me. A ruff of ice framed his body. His little head, turned to one side, rested on the surface, and the big flat gray bulge of his body was mottled and dirty and nasty. One recoiled from the thought that he was cold and the water was even colder, freezing cold. The entire world was colorless, black water, gray snow, gray sky, gray swan; and still, perfectly still. It was all texture, nuances of opacity, of clarity, of light and of darkness, a black and white photograph. I didn't at first notice that the water was moving. Slowly moving, pulled and pulling with it ice chunks, humps of snowy ice, cracked shards of ice, plates of ice broken off, old leaves flat and dirty, black shiny bits of branch, and the big dead lump of swan, all moving, each following a path slightly different from the others, each one according to its own weight, size, buoyancy, so that one log turned a bit as it moved, another revolved, but all crept toward the neck of the pond where under a tangle of fallen leaves the wa-

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ter leaked into a lower wooded place. My fingers were aching. I was aware that I was on guard lest anyone appear and see me. It was as though I felt that I was doing something wrong watching the dead swan and I wanted to be alert so that if anyone came along I would have time to shake off my absorption, my own sense of moving downstream in a long cold dream.

I hadn't at first seen that slow turning of the water, or noticed that the skin of the pond was dragging with it like a slowly sliding table cloth all the objects it carried, ice chunks, twigs, feathers, all sliding darkly away. But something about the swan, something about my thoughts about the dead swan, my sense of how cold he must be, of the chill of the water and the soddenness of his body, held me there, in the dark afternoon, holding my awkward bundles with stiff fingers. Everything had seemed immobile, frozen, utterly still, and when I noticed the slight swerve of the floating world I felt my chilled body sway in response. I saw, as time slowed, that what had seemed frozen and fixed was in motion, that the poor cold swan and his dirty feathers and the little black twigs and the two black maple leaves, although they circled one around another, were nonetheless all moving in the same direction. The swan's body drew me to follow and I walked as close to the water as I dared, leaving the path, and edging bit by bit to the far side. As the swan's body reached the far side of the pond it began to be carried a little bit faster and to turn in a slow spin, in tandem with a birch branch so soaked that its skin seemed not white but pinkish like gauze colored with blood and water. Together these two entered a spin which caused them to circle and bump one another, the swan seemingly heavier and passive, and the birch the aggressor. Strange, that although they were nothing but stuff, one should scourge and the other suffer. Still they reached an equality at last when with a sudden shudder each swung heavily as though to the pulse of a hidden conductor toward the dark place where the waters converged into a braid of water and together the swan and the birch tumbled away. Dead stuff.

Bloody crimson stung the sky in the dark air, and in the trees black twigs tapped and crackled and reached for one another over my head. I made a strange sound in my throat. I felt it come out of me and I heard it leave my mouth and wing away.

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SALLY WOOD

The Approach of Snow

CHES THREW HIS COFFEE GROUNDS IN THE LAKE and bent to rinse the pot. A little mist was coming off the water but it was clear, so clear he saw a school of minnows slide by, halt over the grounds then flick off.

He squatted on the balls of his feet and, for the first time that morning, looked up. The whole lake was smoking but the smoke had begun to drift off and there were the hills, cast in bronze.

He'd seen them when he was a kid—they turned this way each fall—only he didn't know then they were bronze. He didn't know the color of bronze then or the way it rang. If you could strike these hills they'd give off a deep note.

Over the hard line of their tops lingered an edge of yellow sky but above him, above the lake, clouds floated. Hell, they don't need sun here, he thought, they've got enough without sun. He glanced over his shoulder to where, beyond the shack, a maple blazed. The color struck him as outlandish, like pink lemonade. He wondered what the French would say if he painted that, not as abstract, as real. "A tree? That's a tree? What do you take us for?"

He'd tried to tell Marcelle about maples without ever knowing the right word but he wasn't sure if she'd believed him. She'd listened, of course, holding her breath, but then she'd always listened. He wouldn't think about that. Here was the maple, right here.

He plunged his arms into the savage water and splashed his face too, and the reflections were all splintered up like dancing icicles. He dried his face and the coffee pot on the rag and took the pot into the cabin. He cut a thick sandwich out of the ham and stuffed it in one pocket and the whiskey bottle in the other. Rifle? No, he thought, glancing around.

He'd only brought it as he used to years ago so folks would say, "Chester Bills all alone up in the woods? That boy does love to hunt." Only now they said, "Guess you had plenty of practice in the army, Ches. Woodchucks better look out." Funny they didn't know how little modern warfare had to do with woodchuck hunting. Funny any place in the world could be so unchanged. Here it was 1948. Old man Standish's grandson had enlisted, too, when

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they'd both got out of High School with no jobs and hating the Nazis. He'd been in Rand's store buying bolts for his tractor. But he hadn't been sent to Europe. No such luck. And he hadn't got leave in Paris or that windfall of the prize money. He gave Ches a nod. Ches deadpanned back the way you were supposed to. He'd learned how to do this but he didn't feel it. He went out quickly so he wouldn't have to do it too long. He didn't feel the way others did. If he hadn't been in the army he'd never have had a Paris leave. Suppose he'd never seen a Monet in his life, or a Braque, or a Cézanne.

Aunt Martha, very daring, said, but only to Aunt Althea, "He don't have to shoot all the time. He could paint us a picture. It's real pretty up there."

He patted her shoulder but he didn't uncrate any canvases. He kicked one of the crates now back against the wall. Only brought them because there was no other place. Hurry up, he thought, get the hell out of doors.

He started walking with his shoulders hunched, head hanging between them. There was no sound for a while but the soft pad of his feet on the dirt road. Then came a little scuttle. He jerked up automatically and saw a damn fool of a half grown rabbit sitting there freezing in the middle of the road. Why they thought that was protection! It beat him. And if they were going to do it, why did they have to jump first? That round blank eye set in the side of its head with no aim to it, not looking front or out or back!

Behind the rabbit were some dark red bushes. Raspberry colored leaves there were and set against them little clusters of white berries. "Real pretty," Aunt Martha said. His eyes traveled up and he had the feeling of sunlight but it was only trees with thin yellow leaves, transparent so the grey light coming through was changed as if by yellow glass. On the other side of him silvery trunks rose loaded with heavy, thick, brown gold. Some kind of nut tree, he thought, only no burrs. And on both sides wild grape had climbed the trees and bent the branches over the road in arcs of pale spring green.

He stopped. He felt as if while hurrying to a café for a drink he'd found himself in the middle of Notre Dame. Only here were no black ants of old women crawling around. No muttering or mumbling or shuffle of feet. The silence was clean of all that. It was gay like a song.

Marcelle couldn't sing very well but he'd liked to hear her when

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she was sweeping out the place or clattering dishes in that stone sink that was no better—not as good really—as the flat rock he'd used this morning. Rod Helmshaw would come in and she'd stop singing but he'd lift his eyebrows at her broom or run into the dustpan and then shake his head and say, "I don't see how you stand it. I just give them their two bits and chase them out. I don't even let them get breakfast."

Her voice made trills up and down like the vine. He'd got used to it around him, thin, slightly hoarse, and young. He'd ask her what the song was, and she'd always say, *"C'est rien . . . c'est un air de Manon."* But these leaves weren't young. They'd turned this young color for the opposite reason; they were ready to go.

Ches left the road, scrambled over a stone fence and started up the hill by the edge of Grandpa Standish's grape field. The grapes had been picked before he came. More than a week ago, he thought. Only the vines hung, pale and empty on their wires, row after row like the waves of the sea. On the other side of him, the ravine side, pines rose up, untouched by the season, dark and still.

Far up above Ches could hear Grandpa Standish yelling at his team. What in creation was the old man doing? What was there to do? Ches without thinking stepped behind the bushes like an Indian. All his boyhood he'd been careful not to be caught up here without a rifle. Might as well have your pants down.

He heard a slithering and skittering on the stones of the lane and he knew then what it was but he still looked out. There was the old man walking behind his team, behind and at the side, braced back and hollering, the reins in his hands. Next to him bumped the stone-boat full of new cut logs. The last crop of the season, thought Ches. Have to get wood in before it snows.

He turned down into the glen under the pines but it was like going into a crypt. You could hardly see. There was a damp smell. After a few minutes he looked back at the leafy trees on the edge. How can it be so dark in here when the sun is shining? he thought. He looked again and saw that the sun wasn't shining, only the leaves were.

Climbing up the field he thought, I've seen all this before. I just didn't remember. The eyes of a boy blur things. Now when I really *can* see, only now, do I know that I have already.

Like the first drawing old Fresnac had praised, the one of Marcelle's hands. Most of the boys disliked a model's hands. They found it disillusioning that a white nude should have these rough,

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chapped hands and a weathered neck. Not Ches. He'd finished the figure quickly—there was not much to it—and torn off a new sheet. They were working hands, muscular and with knotty joints though the original shape was small and delicate. Only afterward did he see they were somewhat like his mother's.

The wild geraniums on the edge of the woods spattered the ground. You couldn't see the stems; the little round fern leaves in their flat clusters looked suspended. They looked like tiny notes of music, grace notes. He followed them up between the vinyard and the ravine, his eyes held by the small, gay dots. Strange you could only see the pattern when it had turned so pale. All summer it hung there invisible, green against green. Behind it was a thicket of witch hazel standing out too, the cocoa colored foliage clinging to the stems just to set off the fluffy, greenish yellow seeds.

These he had copied down patiently as a boy. He'd drawn whole note books full of these and other leaves. The word Art wasn't mixed up in it. His high school teacher didn't even call it Botany, it was Science.

Trudging along, he picked a bunch of forgotten grapes. They were as cold as marbles in his hand. They had a flat taste; they'd been frozen. He spat the first two out and dropped the rest.

He hadn't got back to this country until after the grapes had been picked. But he remembered—oh, from long ago—the smell when they were lying in crates at the end of the vines. You smelled it best at night or out on the water. It was like the communion table in church when he was a boy. But blood didn't really resemble wine. He'd seen plenty of blood when he was growing up on the farm. And then one day that little bit on Marcelle's handkerchief.

She'd looked so frightened, almost cringing at first. In a minute she'd straightened up proudly.

"C'est les poumons. Tu n'as pas peur?"

He reached the oak at the top of the field. An oak is strong, he thought, but never gloomy like pines. It never casts a sullen shade. It is only strong. The leaves were dark green with strong russet edges when all the other leaves were light. He leaned against the tree a moment and looked down at the lake.

It was steely. How surprising to see it flat and cold in the midst of all this. It had no relation to anything else.

Ches took his hands out of his pockets and blew on the fingers. Then he turned up into the woods that were like leaping flames.

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Impossible not to feel warm in the woods. The glory penetrated—whether you wanted it to or not—right to the bone. You couldn't make out, walking along, the separate colors of separate trees. They mixed together like instruments in an orchestra. The hell with spring. Suppose it did bring summer, it was nothing to this. You simply didn't think—you didn't let yourself—how short this was.

French painters only painted spring and summer. They hadn't any fall, not to speak of. Americans said you couldn't do it because no one had. Suppose Monet had ever once seen this. Or Seurat. What in God's name wouldn't Seurat have done with Grandpa Standish's pasture?

Ches came to a clearing. There a maple, alone among the other trees, had let go its leaves. They lay in a circle on the ground as if a woman had slid down her petticoat, and they were fresh and brighter, much brighter than roses. He'd never seen such a carpet in his life, all drifted and glowing. The color radiated upward, so intense, so satisfying you hardly noticed the border of ordinary yellow trees.

He put his hand down and picked up a red leaf and was surprised to find it cold and the veins still pale green. He was afraid to look up for fear this incredible room would be gone, this wild, impossible room in the middle of the woods. He was afraid not to look up, too. It was still there really, of course.

He said out loud, "I'm going to eat my lunch."

Leaning against a smooth, cool tree he drew the pint of whisky from his pocket. The first mouthful tasted like water as it did outdoors when it was cold enough. He took another drink. The colors became more believable. The whisky was singing inside him and they were singing outside. Without looking down he unwrapped the sandwich, stiff hands fumbling. He was nothing but eyes now though his eyes were half closed and the colors were not singled out but hummed together in his head like a summer afternoon with bees.

He munched and mumbled, "Mustn't look too long."

He knew you could see better if you went away and then, if necessary, came back. But if he came back, even soon, the next day or the day after that the rosy fire would be turning brown. It would be nothing but dead leaves to scuffle through and they'd be matted down, mud-colored if it rained, and would sink slowly in the forest floor and next spring they'd be pierced with new wintergreen and little fronds of fern pushed through and uncurling.

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He stuffed the sandwich paper in his pocket and walked through the clearing. His feet made no noise; the leaves were as springy as moss. From the far side he looked back. There it still was, the fire from below between yellow walls with a ceiling, he saw now, of rather heavy, rather threatening grey.

He strode on blindly, not seeing what was in front, still seeing what was behind, the clearing undimmed in his head. Twigs cracked under his feet, he heard a faint rustle and jerked up. It was only poplar leaves shaking and twinkling on their tree like the glass pendants of a chandelier. Marcelle had liked to get dressed up on Sunday afternoons and go to places like the *Musée de Cluny,* places that were *convenable* for a painter. When he'd first seen a chandelier he'd thought right away of a poplar. Beyond the woods were quite bare.

He felt colder. He stepped out of the woods and a sheet of cold hit him.

He stumbled along, almost running, beside a broken fence. There was an abandoned farm somewhere; it would be shelter. But look as he would he couldn't see the roof, nothing but tawny fields always mounting and between them strips of timber. But there—his eyes were streaming now from the cold, he wiped them with a fist—there was a lilac bush. It couldn't stand alone in a field, it had to be in somebody's dooryard. He headed for it.

When he got near it, there was shelter, other trees and bushes. He got out his bandanna. When he could see again he made out red pips on the scratchy vines. These pips had been roses, half tame, he guessed, and half wild. That little gnarley tree was a Seckel pear. The long, entangling shoots of raspberry bushes slowed him. House must have fallen in, right down into its cellar probably. Yes, there was an edge of roof propped up on the ruins of a chimney. A couple of beams were sticking out, grey and ready to break at a touch but they'd been noble trees. You could still see ax marks on them. They used an ax in those days as neatly as men used a penknife now.

He was knee deep in a lily bed and wading slowly. There might be a well. They weren't filled in, the half of them. His leg struck something. He bent down and parted the long strands of leaf. There was a thin stone upended. His hands slid along rounded corners, they clung, they lingered. A gravestone! Who could be buried up here?

He sat down on his haunches and scratched away at the leaves, the moss.

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He had to take a stick and his handkerchief. He uncovered letters.

HANNAH MARY BATES

He's never heard of any Bateses, never. Aunt Martha and Aunt Althea, why hadn't they told him? He worked again on the stone.

BORN MAY 1835 (Here was a covered patch.) 1860

That was why. It was before their time. Before the time of anyone he knew.

Even so, why hadn't she been buried in town? The cemetery had graves older than this. He sat there thinking about Hannah Mary, her flowers, her fruit trees and her well built house. He decided: It was winter. They were snowed in. Her man—he felt a keen pang for him—had to bury her. Maybe he'd had to light fires to melt the ground.

His hand still rested on the stone, the smooth old stone. He was stroking it. He hadn't dared to stroke that other one, the one he'd had such a hard time buying with his poor French.

He blew on his fingers, took up the stick, rubbed first one way and then another on the covered patch. It was a piece of lichen stuck tight. Finally it loosened, uncovered the words, OCTOBER 5.

They weren't snowed in. She must have *wanted* to be buried here. Why?

He got to his feet slowly and turned around. Oh.

He'd been walking uphill so intently he hadn't looked back.

There below him spread the whole country, miles and miles, hills folding into each other softly and yet strongly like vast sculptures by Michelangelo. Some were matted with woods and others bare, revealing every gully. The texture was wonderfully varied but not more than the light. It came from the hills themselves, not the sky. They were all warm and alive with color sloping down to the flat glitter of the lake.

So Hannah Mary had had this before her. She'd been the right one to have it. She had made that plain.

He started walking down the track that was once a road. Out in the open he could see farther. The land, from here, was large, but the sky larger. Over it moved in a majestic way a procession of plumy clouds. Funeral clouds, *pompes funèbres*. Why didn't hearses in this country have plumes?

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But, to get down the hill, he had to look in front of him and everywhere in front sprang up the gaiety of the leaves. Why? he thought. Why? Spring has no such palette. It's mild and sweet and there's rose madder in the sky, but compared to this . . . What was that word of Rod's? Insignificant. Spring is insignificant. He shivered. The cold was bitter. Tomorrow, he thought, all the leaves will go.

Walking so fast, his feet sliding on the small pebbles, he could just manage to keep warm. The descent was steep on the old road. It was like plunging, like diving, a series of dives rather, into lower and lower patches of woods.

He had been hurrying so, his eyes had been so fastened on the ground, that it was a surprise to come out by the water. Ches stopped. The lake was whipped cobalt. The hills, for some stupendous reason of their own, had turned purple and reared against the sky across the lake looking royal and garish. Ches rubbed his eyes.

"Can you feature that?" he said out loud. "Nobody'd believe that. Old Fresnac would say it was *truqué*."

He walked along beside the water, gazing. He shut his eyes a minute and then opened them. The colors were the same, splashes of cobalt and that astounding purple.

"Maybe he don't know everything," he said, "old Fresnac . . . Maybe not."

He broke into a clumsy run. He'd been hurrying, really, for some time. Here, at last, was the shack. He left the door open and fumbled around for his paint box. His fingers were stiff but there was no time to make a fire. He got the strap off, found a square of board. He sat on the doorstep.

"I'll just note it down." He squeezed tubes of paint onto the palette. "After all, it's here," he said under his breath. "And it's not the first time. These hills have always done like this whenever they wanted to."

His hands, when he started using them, grew limber. The paint came out right; the lines too. It turned into a rough sketch.

He'd tried to tell Marcelle, to tell her about fall here. Had she believed him? Hell, why not? She'd believed everything. She didn't have the time not to believe. And somebody else had seen it. Once. He knew her too, he couldn't help but know her. Name of Hannah Mary Bates.

When he'd finished he lit the kerosene lamp and looked at the

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board, then looked out. What a difference between the bright wet paint and the lake now! Evening had dimmed everything already, dimmed and dulled everything. He stuffed some paper and some shavings in the stove, a couple of sticks, lit corners of the paper, closed the drafts. It would catch. He'd go out a minute and see if there was any light left because by tomorrow . . .

He stepped outdoors and the leaves, fallen yesterday and now dry, scurried like little animals over the ground. He went to the road. The colors were drowning slowly. Here and there a maple branch like a last waving arm showed red and then disappeared into the grey. It was such a gradual immersion you could hardly say at one second, "Here are colors," and at another—"They're gone."

He walked on, hoping they weren't gone, just walking. It got quite dark and he turned around. Even now there was something. Certain trees seemed covered with mist. The yellow ones, he knew. The mist lay on their branches so white, so airy they looked like fruit trees in bloom.

Ches hit his bed after supper. And fell into sleep like falling down a well.

When his eyes opened it felt late though there wasn't much light. He hardly knew where he was at first. Then the weathered pine of the walls got clearer. Against it he could see his breath. He shoved paper and kindling in the lukewarm stove and it lit from the ashes. He pulled on his boots and unlatched the door.

The hills were powdered with snow. The air smelt of snow. It had stripped the maple. Its leaves had joined those he had heard last night. They lay on the ground, brown and aimless.

The lake was a dark mirror, so old it reflected nothing. He wondered how soon it would freeze over, get two-dimensional, a surface without any depth. That happened to people too. But quicker.

He turned his coat collar up.

That poor fellow a hundred years ago up on the hill! By now he would have dug the grave. He would have rested a moment by it, maybe, though he was so strong. You could see by the way he used his axe. He didn't need to rest at all really.

Because after that it couldn't have been much work. Oh no, it wasn't. They were light when you lifted them.

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MICHAEL VAN WALLEGHEN

Driving Into Enid

for Louis Jenkins

Hundreds of migrating hawks are roosting in the hedgerows around Enid, Oklahoma. If the sun were out you could see they were a reddish-brown and had creamy, speckled bellies. But today it's raining in Enid and the rain is mixed with snow. The hawks are merely silhouettes today, far off.

On sunny days, driving into Enid might easily remind you of a scene in a grade school geography book: behind the hawk on the fencepost, a train goes speeding toward some grain elevators on the outskirts of the city . . . then the horizon, and an airplane flying low over a few tall buildings. But today the winter grasses tremble on the hillsides and the scarce trees tremble.

I was just thinking I had come a long way . . . I was just thinking that next year, for sure, I'd buy a new car. I must have been thinking something like that on the outskirts, passing the first small factories, the ragged fields strewn with junk. . . .

Then, at the first stop light, some kid waves at me from the back seat of a police car . . . inscrutable, fierce. He looks like a kid I knew in grade school. His mother wore a fur coat in the middle of summer and believed the Russians were shooting tornadoes at us.

What did he do? Where are they taking him? They found him in a culvert trying to gut a chicken with a piece of glass . . . they found him trying to build a fire out of cowshit and wet sticks. They found him alright and now he's going back.

Later on, I'll find his sister quite by accident selling cameras in the discount store. She has a crooked, shy face and reddish-brown hair. She's married now and her chewed fingers are tatooed SUE on one hand DAVE on the other.

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More Trouble With the Obvious

A baby bird has fallen from its tree and lies feebly peeping dead center of the bright circle under our streetlight. What is there to do but bring it in? We dutifully prepare a shoebox, then mix up the baby food and hamburger of an old routine we know by heart, the ritual we've learned as children—but the truth is, in all the years since childhood, neither my wife nor I can remember having saved a single bird. We won't save this one either, trembling weakly now on the kitchen table, refusing to do so much as open its beak for our ridiculous food.

It lives with us two days, then dies suddenly in my hand—of "heart attack" my neighbor says. "Young birds like that almost always die of heart attack." He says this pounding nails in his porch and I believe him. In fact, I feel stupid for having mentioned it at all. A heart attack. Of course. The best thing would have been not to touch it. Perhaps it would have found a place to hide; and then, in the morning, its mother might have flown down to feed it. In any case, it's dead now and buried in the garden. The same garden, by the way, from which my neighbor's cat wrestled a live snake once into the hubbub of our barbecue.

But then I seem to have always had trouble with the obvious. Once, when a friend died, and after my parents had told me he had died, I came around the next morning anyway to call him out for school. His mother came to the door weeping and told me Orville couldn't go to school that day. I felt as if I had been walking in my sleep. I knew my parents hadn't lied, and I certainly knew what death meant; but somehow, until that moment, I must have thought it was just a dream I'd had. At school, another friend said he thought Orville died from eating donuts every night for supper. I had no trouble at all believing that. By then, donuts made about as much sense as anything.

A baby bird has fallen from its tree . . . someone you love perhaps is dying in another city. There must be something we can do. I remember one Sunday Orville and I got down on our knees in an alley and asked the Blessed Mother for a kite. When we

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found a rolled up kite in the next ashcan with the rubber bands still on it, we *knew* it was a miracle. And we were glad, of course; but neither one of us, I think, were overwhelmed. We just believed in miracles and thought they happened all the time. We thought the birds we found needed milk and bread. We thought when they got big they would be our friends, do us wonderful favors, and keep us company forever.

Do Not Dump Dead Animals

Oracle, Arizona 1976

Here at the Oracle dump the dumping of dead animals is strictly forbidden—and for my part I think it's a good idea. I can see this means to be a nice dump and that it wouldn't take many dead animals to subvert that intention. Live animals, however, are excused. Cows, for instance, by accident or design, are to be found nosing through the garbage all over the place—huge cows with red eyes and filthy muzzles. But honk your horn, shout at them, and they'll fix you with a look so full of bliss, so void of all suspicion, mere humans are forced to look away. If this were heaven, in other words, these cows might pass for angels. No cow in India, I think, could look more perfectly at home.

I rather like it here myself. I like the cratered, smoking, heaped up aspect of the place, the kitchen sink irony of it all. What's a perfectly good artificial leg, for instance, doing in the shotgunned stove? And who owned the violin full of Eisenhower buttons? I like the festive way old wire, underwear, innertubes, newspaper, bread wrappers, toilet paper, paper bags, rags, ribbons of bright plastic animate the shattered trees—and of course I like the cows too. If this really were a kind of heaven, would it be so bad to come back here as a cow? When I ask a cow that question she just stares at me, puzzled, drooling little strings of green slime. What does she care? She stares at me so long I almost offer her an apology. Do you suppose the dead are like

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this? Perhaps they really do hear us, but from their vantage in paradise any answer they might make seems to them all nonsense and forgone.

The Oracle dump is on high ground and when the wind is right you can look out over the desert for miles in any direction. Today, I can read the letters on the Magma Copper smoke stack down in San Manuel. I can make out the toy cars shining in the parking lot—and when the shift whistle blows, I can follow a few small trails of dust almost to the mountains surrounding Tucson. Other cars grow larger as they speed across the valley toward trailer courts in Oracle or Mammoth. And sometimes a car turns off the Oracle road and heads up here toward the dump. This time it's a young woman in a dusty pickup. She parks beside me and gets out with a rifle. Then she tries to coax a cat out from under the front seat. "Come here," she says, "come here sweetheart."

I can see she wants me to help her. I can see she would rather not have to do this thing but feels, perhaps, that the dumping of sick, live animals is cowardly and cruel. Now she is down on her hands and knees angling for a clear shot underneath the truck . . . I can hear her crying. She sounds like someone who has tried and tried but can't light the pilot underneath the stove. The washing machine is broken and she can't fix it. How will she pay the rent? Huge cows track up the kitchen, wreck the living room. But rules are rules, after all, so I go on pretending to be a worried man looking for something important: a bill of sale thrown out inadvertantly, a priceless heirloom, the letter that might finally prove my innocence.

Walking the Baby to the Liquor Store

It's nearly ten o'clock in the morning and I have work to do. I have to write a novel and a book of criticism. I have also a book of Mongolian double sestinas to translate, a verse play that needs a final act, and a movie script that's hardly off the ground.

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Besides that, I haven't published a book of my own poetry in weeks, so it's absolutely imperative that I get busy. But first, first I have to take the baby to the liquor store. A brilliant career is one thing—but being a good father, that's what *really* counts.

The baby adores going to the liquor store. In her infant mind there is, perhaps, nothing so beautiful or significant in this world as sitting up in her yellow stroller and rolling bravely west toward some exotically remote BUNNY'S—or, on Sundays, a place as unimaginably far away as KIRBY'S LIQUOR. Such, at least, is the radiant dignity of her expression. And when that snarling German Pincher throws himself, all teeth and slather, against the pigeon lady's fence on Maple Street, she doesn't turn a hair. Why should she? This morning she's Cleopatra and the liquor store is Rome.

Believe me, I wouldn't miss these excursions for the world. I wouldn't miss them even if it meant giving up the National Book Award. How much trouble is it, after all, to go out walking with the baby? How much work could one possibly do in that brief half hour? And measured against such joy, such pure infant bliss (which may well indeed anticipate a lifetime's happiness) how important is it that I go to work at all? Sometimes, when we get home from the liquor store, the baby and I are so happy we even do the dishes and have a drink, by God, right there in the kitchen.

The baby knows four words: mommy, daddy, banana and doggy. Could anyone write a novel more interesting than that? It's something I think about often in the glittering flourescent kitchen after the baby's gone to sleep. And who knows what she'll come up with next? Luckily enough for me, the rigorous disciplines of my craft have trained me in patience. I can probably wait until tomorrow before going to the liquor store again. I can probably fall asleep on the porch tonight like any tired father in mid-career—watching the fireflies coming on and going out again in the long grass like so many sparks flying off the anvil of the world.

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ROBLEY WILSON, JR.

Yankee Poet

A cup is bound to spill, a saucer to break,
Some blunder to bring on a clumsy lull
In civilized talk. I know. We're that full
Of Nature; a fair number of mistakes

Occur to us by instinct. But we are
Worth all the crockery. We make a show
For the sophisticated folks; we do
A homely trick or two with stones and stars;

We own, ruefully, to some trafficking
With Satan, and a middling taste for hate
Into the bargain. Virtue and sin debate
At the town meetings of our souls. I think

New England makes more poems because it lies
So far from Heaven and so near to Hell.
We know them both, and the old glaciers tell
Us truths in granite. Yet we are not wise.

Only this morning I raked up some leaves
The frost knocked down, but what they might have meant—
Portents of mortality, gravely sent—
I missed to praise the colors autumn gives.

I know it's foolish for a man to read
The splendid side of death. I ought instead
To think how grim it is to curl up dead
Across a gold and green October bed—

That's the new way. I hope my ignorance
Turns out to be real wisdom at the last.
You can't know anything except the past;
Tradition sets the straightest line to sense.

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SYDNEY LEA

Recalling the Horseman Billy Farrell from an Airplane in Vermont

He watched a cloud. It brought him
the shape of one horse or another:
"Was it Cinders? I disremember . . .
a big trot . . . early autumn,
grass to the pommel. September."

Toward dark the ridges smothered
day. The rattling wagon
winnowed birds. How smart
his bays—"like hens on hot stone"—
that drew us along. I've discovered

the painter's failure of heart.
I've tried to draw his face
from the land, his language, the land
in his language: "Damn the wind!
Enough to shake owls from the trees!"

They come back, every phrase;
but I've lost his face in the clouds.
You learn in time to fail.
He spat on the hardening road,
bad heel propped on the rail,

as out of the grainfields the geese
flew, the time flew, September
he darkened and died.
Heart rattles. Strange as disease
or god, the airplane roars

down the ridges. Wind shakes. Auroras
rise and whack at the sky.
Frost on the tarmac glints

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and goes out like sparks off hooves,
or the face I can't remember,

but off to the west I squint
at a spot out of actual sight,
and Billy mounts and moves.

For Don C., Against a Proverb

"The simple are killed by their turning away."

I use examples:
you blew away

an insect's froth
to find him hidden

as in a pew.
I've seen you kneel

to sniff a stone
or chafe a bone,

bringing the full-fleshed,
fly-strafed, stamping

beast to mind.
Once, bent beachward

at the lake, you tried
to name the maker

of some human track,
imagine his mission,

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his conversation.
Don, for you

I'm flouting Scripture.
Spiders sew

the woods together.
Limb to limb.

The sun assumes
one color, then

another, others.
Likewise moon

and dust and dew.
Your sermon was weather;

things; stars:
now *they* could write

their meanings, and none
was a dream of some

dim future. Home
for you was always

salt-scent that rose
from working clothes,

the snap and hiss
in a stewpot, blood

and down on wife
and sons amid

the frantic dance
of slaughtered chickens,

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agony
about the ribs

where love laid on
a velvet whip.

I've thought of the death,
of how some death

like yours should make
the Proverbs blanch

in shame. I bring
to mind the hand,

hard-horned and bursting
pods to see

familiar seeds
take wind. They rise

at dawn against
the whitening sky

like those last hardy
melancholy

stars afloat
in bright new morning—

stars that won't
put themselves out,

nor quite turn out
till they are blown out.

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JEROME MAZZARO

Fall Colors

Rioting the roadsides, the fall colors
obscure along these miles between Hamburg
and Eden nearby streams and steady hums
of rushing water with their turning leaves.
My eye, that practiced hunter, ferrets out
a brimming river and its flow and one
odd man fishing those capped, dark blue rapids,
his hipboots severed by the river's line.
Along the roadways, too, wait empty cars,
while owners with their rifles underarm
stalk carefully the wilds for would-be game,
their blackwatch colors blending into brush.
In town, two youngsters claim a lonely bench
beside the movie house, waiting for cars
with girls and trophies of a summer sort.
A car appears landing them with its catch.
So much like my own boyhood these scenes are,
and yet the present's truer to their marks.
Next week, the pearl grey mist of early fall
will mute like Abishag the few leaves left.

Pacific Beach

Much as the coastal roads emerge from mist
these wintry mornings, those places we had
gone all that long summer have lost our cast.
Fresh, sharp outlines appear. The sands belong
to others walking slowly as paths lead,
as if the world conferred on them its song.
Unused to being looked at, we felt less

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confident those mornings, wondering what
might finally distract those eyes from us
and give us back the selves we had before,
yet reached coevally for the bright note
we struck together and heard everywhere.
The couples here respond as we did then.
More luck to them. We didn't last the fall,
retreating to vague silences again.
Tonight, as if in recompense, the view
crashes with such intensity I feel
swept clean and ready to begin anew.

Laguna Beach: The Settlement

Coasts and marriages collapse,
bringing houses to wreck
as slowly, quietly the soil
gives way, then splitting wood
and wires. Huge gaps appear.
Last month, when the planes came down,
a woman claimed blood filled
her hands and it wasn't hers.
And yet this urge for shelter.

Our own impulse was to cushion:
arms, furniture, walls, friends.
But unlike those others,
there are no insurance companies
we can sue for settlement—
only ourselves.
Car, furniture, and kids,
forced from the scene,
are half of what they were.

Knowing the fault was long
in forming is of no help.
I think rather of the stone crab

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that, damaged, quickly grows
back claws and of that ancient tale
that sees me seeking a new half.
Water tables, rains, reasons
are oily and remote.
Investigation will go on for years.

JERALD BULLIS

Revelation

The problem, surely, is to live with Here;
to spell *as if* so well we willingly suspend our disbelief
in the nothing that was here, is here, and will be:

till the overcast extensions of snow and ice,
black conifers on the stream's far ridge beside the highway,
whatever shakes us with its rusty splendor—till these

are not mere nature—no more than hell and heaven
when we knew them in the yearnings of our flesh
were mere—but compose instead the haven we must praise:

this gritty snow, our onyx; the walked-on moon, still there,
its televised rock our true chalcedony; the wrong paths
we take, the concrete sorrows—these, our streets of gold.

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HAYDEN CARRUTH

Love Poem

What is inside
the violin?
Nothing. Nothing

at all, you see?
Only this emptiness.
But oh and yet

and nevertheless
when someone outside
touches the strings

then the emptiness sings.
It's
almost a miracle.

Naturally we have plenty of other
explanations
always. But let's not bother

with them, shall we? The world so full
of tedious things.
It is emptiness

in the violin,
Joanna,
emptiness that sings.

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A Particular Valentine

for Joanna

Falling, inevitably clumsy,
  in Donner's snow
as into the myth of hardship,
  a little February melt
trickling below
  like old blood on the granite,
so old it has gone pale now
  but crushed still from the cold,
famine, losses lost
  in time, the wasted indomitability
of love.

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SONYA RUDIKOFF

How Many Lovers Had Virginia Woolf?

IF MY TITLE SUGGESTS the buzz of biographical speculation which surrounds the work and reknown of this most famous of modern women writers, that is precisely what I want to summon. Now, almost forty years after her death, when most of her contemporaries are dead, the interest in Woolf and her work continues to be reinforced by the publication of letters, diaries, critical or biographical studies, and other material.[1] Bloomsbury itself is a subject of increasing interest too, and the various members of the group have all emerged or been retrieved from oblivion. And the candor of the present time, when anything at all can be printed or said or done, permits a kind of biographical inquiry which would have astonished our predecessors. In literary biography the use of the insights of depth psychology has long been a standard procedure, but now not only are all biographical facts available for research and hypothesis, but even material which once might have seemed unsuitable or unobtainable becomes useful in the context of present scholarship. Woolf led a relatively quiet life in contrast, say, to Anaïs Nin, but there is hardly a detail of her personal life which is not known and studied, hardly a fact of her emotional history or domestic routine which is not processed as interesting, relevant, usable. The examination of Shakespeare's laundry lists used

[1] *Moments of Being, Unpublished Autobiographical Writings*, ed. and with an introduction and notes by Jeanne Schulkind (New York: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, 1976); *The Diary of Virginia Woolf, Vol. II*, ed. by Anne Olivier Bell, assisted by Andrew McNeillie (New York: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, 1978); *The Letters of Virginia Woolf, Vols. III, IV, V*, ed. by Nigel Nicholson and Joanne Trautmann (New York: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, 1977, 1978, 1979); *Bloomsbury: A House of Lions*, by Leon Edel (Philadelphia: J. P. Lippincott, 1979); *The Novels of Virginia Woolf, From Beginning to End*, by Mitchell Leaska, afterword by John Lehmann (New York: John Jay Press, 1977); *The Novels of Virginia Woolf*, by Hermoine Lee (New York: Holmes and Meier, 1977); *Virginia Woolf, Sources of Madness and Art*, by Jean O. Love (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977); *The Unknown Virginia Woolf*, by Roger Poole (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978); *Woman of Letters, A Life of Virginia Woolf*, by Phyllis Rose (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978); *Continuing Presences, Virginia Woolf's Use of Literary Allusion*, by Beverly Ann Schlack (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1979); *A Marriage of True Minds, An Intimate Portrait of Leonard and Virginia Woolf*, by George Spater and Ian Parsons (New York: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, 1977); *Sir Leslie Stephen's "Mausoleum Book,"* with an introduction by Alan Bell (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977).

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to be the prototype of petty and narrow scholarly research, now it is menstrual periods which have been analyzed for their significance—as in the work of Emily Dickinson, for example. Whatever can be found can be used, in other words.

And if my title should recall more specifically a famous essay on Lady Macbeth, that allusion is also something I want to summon here. The work of Virginia Woolf once would have seemed as far as it was possible to be from classical or traditional scholarship, and yet now, of course, that work has become part of the university English curriculum, and the entire field of modern literature is a province of scholarship, with all the implied panoply of scholarly apparatus. Some people speak knowingly of a "Woolf industry," as if there had never been similar scholarly enterprises devoted to Byron, Shelley, Keats, or to that most productive one of all, the Johnson-and-Boswell industry, or as if Woolf were the only modern writer so industriously researched. The resources of modern scholarship are of course available for any subject whatsoever. Microfilm and copiers can facilitate the annotation of texts, the exhuming of earlier versions, the circulation of newly discovered manuscripts. The recent printing of *The Pargiters,* and the forthcoming publication of *Melymbrosia,* early versions of *The Years* and *The Voyage Out,* might not have been issued at an earlier time. Concordances to Woolf's work are now appearing, studies of her literary allusions and of her reading notebooks. Computer analysis is a technique which Caroline Spurgeon could have used in her study of Shakespeare's imagery and altogether the facilities of libraries for circulating and reproducing rare documents have been immeasurably enhanced by the new technology of research. If modern scholarship has embraced Virginia Woolf, Noël Annan's description of Leslie Stephen in his Kensington study is no longer what we must have in mind,

> . . . a Victorian gentleman such as Darwin or Acton, who sat in his own library and digested its contents without much recourse to the British Museum. He read his sources, memorized their arguments, pondered, and then sat down and wrote without the apparatus of card indexes and cross-references.

Instead we must think of the scholar sitting at the computer. It is not Woolf studies which have become an industry however, but scholarship itself, in that highly advanced production and distribution of knowledge which have become characteristic of our age.

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Not all the contemporary study of Woolf is marked by the new research technology however; quite a lot of it, in fact, is simply the application of traditional scholarly methods to the work of a writer once thought unworthy even of the old scholarship. The use of such methods in a new context is what makes the difference; social and historical and biographical discussion of writer and text has once again become a legitimate procedure, and the renewed interest in social contexts of literature occurs at a much more sophisticated level, divorced from the earlier pieties which once accompanied such social analysis. Neither post-Victorian moralizing nor parochial politicising restricts criticism, and the relative exhaustion of the New Criticism has encouraged critics to look beyond the text alone to the surrounding context, however broadly or narrowly conceived. Nowadays even the most explicitly psychological discussion of literature cannot affront contemporary taste; nothing a critic could say even about writers still living—Norman Mailer or James Baldwin or Adrienne Rich—has not already been said by the writers themselves. The rise of elite journalism, with its candid gossipy broadcasting of intimacy contributes to the comfortable acceptance of public discussion about any statement or subject imaginable, especially those which were once considered unmentionable. Woolf's suicide used to be noted courteously, discreetly, but now, like everything else in her life or work, it invites extensive comment. The death of Leonard Woolf in 1969, and the deaths of most of the figures in the Woolfs' milieu, and the new accessibility of manuscripts and archives, have all occurred at a time when critics are able to read the work and the life differently, in greater depth, and with greater knowledge.

Although Woolf lived until she was fifty-nine, without suffering from any major accident or disease, not cancer, or tuberculosis, syphilis, emphysema, diphtheria, erysipelas, malaria, cholera, stroke, or heart trouble, it was a life marked by tragic losses and mental illness, and, at the end, by suicide. Her mother, the beautiful Julia, is usually accounted the first of Woolf's deep attachments, with the most enduring impact on her, dying in 1895 when the young Virginia was thirteen. There is hardly a Woolf study which does not follow Woolf's own interpretation of this event, which occupied the supreme place in her own personal legend. It was the beginning of unreality, of a conspiracy imposed by the world of propriety on the insouciant experience of the childhood world of freedom and feeling:

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> The tragedy of her death was not that it made one, now and then and very intensely, unhappy. It was that it made her unreal; and us solemn and selfconscious. We were made to act parts that we did not feel; to fumble for words that we did not know. It obscured, it dulled. It made one hypocritical and immeshed in the conventions of sorrow.

Some critics have linked the mother's death at the outset of adolescence with the young Virginia's menarche, theorizing about the loss of a feminine role model and maternal figure and its implications at one of the crucial psychosexual stages of development. Jean Love, in her study of "the sources of madness and art" in Woolf, also sees Julia Stephen's death in this way, as it inaugurated twelve years of family tragedy and pointed to the young Virginia's future literary vocation. Love's most distinctive documentation comes from the unpublished letters of Julia and Leslie Stephen (which were not available to any Woolf critic before 1974), as well as from other early material, including Leslie Stephen's "Mausoleum Book," his self-justifying sentimental account written for the family after Julia's death, and diaries and other material less familiar than Woolf's own diary and letters.

What becomes clear in this study is not so much that Woolf's attachment to her mother was severely ruptured by the mother's death—obviously it was—as that it was an unfulfilled attachment to a frequently absent mother, melancholic, preoccupied, and excessively attached to *her own* mother. In 1940, Woolf asked herself, in "A Sketch of the Past," "Can I remember ever being alone with her for more than a few minutes?" It was in fact the *lack* of attachment which so profoundly affected the young Virginia and which made her feel so susceptible to the need for that care-taking maternal kind of love in her later life, as she herself put it,

> . . . the maternal protection which, for some reason, is what I had always most wished from everyone. What L [Leonard] gives me, and Nessa [her sister] gives me and Vita [Victoria Sackville-West], in her more clumsy external way, tries to give me.

Love connects the loss of the absent mother with some of Woolf's most characteristic imaginative methods. Thus, her specific capacity for fantasy, and for blurring the boundaries of inner and outer reality, enabled her to keep the idealized mother alive in fantasy, and this process became the foundation of her scene-making, what she later called "making up." In the letters and diary she speaks of-

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ten of "making up" people or scenes as she walks along the London streets or in the country, of "making up" friends, a fantasy of real people embroidered with her own invention of events and actions. *Orlando* was such a "making up" of Sackville-West, and earlier there had been various inventions around others. Scenes, sensations, and literary arguments were "made up" in a kind of submersion of self into a passionate sustained inner activity of fantasy and identification. The confusion of subjective and objective events was occasionally deliberate, a habit her relatives discounted and her friends found disconcerting; clearly it was also linked to Woolf's gift for imagining "the world without a self." It must also have been part of what came to be called Woolf's "madness," including the strange figure in the mirror, the man at her mother's deathbed, later the conviction that birds were speaking in Greek or that King Edward VII was uttering obscenities in the shrubbery, and so on.

Roger Poole's study, *The Unknown Virginia Woolf*, is inspired by ambiguities in this very question of Woolf's madness. He doesn't seem to have made any use of the important Julia and Leslie Stephen letters, nor of other unpublished material, but rather bases his entire hypothesis on a very literal reading of Woolf's novels, of Leonard Woolf's early novels, and of the recently published autobiographical writings in *Moments of Being*. He conjectures that the young Virginia may have been disturbed by the death of the mother she adored, and of the father she also adored and came later to resent, but that this often difficult woman and writer was attempting to communicate in behavior labeled "mad" the unreality of the world around her. The repetitive argument, fascinating if the reader knows the novels and the events well enough, is grounded in existentialist notions of the young Virginia's *embodiment* and in assumptions about madness and sanity associated with Merleau-Ponty, Husserl, and R. D. Laing. Thus, the disturbance from which Woolf suffered was to be seen as a sickness of her milieu, reinforced in the sexual violations of her own personal space committed by her half-brothers, and made worse by Leonard Woolf's own rationalistic care-taking role which turned Virginia into a child and patient and "disconfirmed" her sense of her own embodiment.

Surely it is an indication of the new and advanced stage of Woolf criticism that Poole's book should be published now, because it attempts to carry the biographical speculation further

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than Quentin Bell's authorized biography of 1972 succeeded in taking it. Poole's conception is quite at variance with the commonly accepted interpretation of the Woolfs' marriage, and of Woolf's attempts to express and exorcise the demons which in the end overwhelmed her, and he radically revises the image of Woolf presented to the world over these forty years. Especially in the close reading of Leonard's autobiography and novels, and the detailed scrutiny of sequences in Virginia's life and work, Poole opposes the received version of her madness. There is, also, an unusual interpretation of her suicide notes, in which she told Leonard that no two people could have been happier and that she was going mad again and wouldn't recover this time. In Poole's view, this represents Virginia's final capitulation to Leonard's view of her as insane, the culmination of her long struggle to assert vision against fact, art against rationalism, experience against theory. Admitting fears that she might go mad "again" and praising his devotion and care, she acknowledged his, and the world's, conception, even phrasing it in *their* terms—her "madness"—and thus she surrendered. The gulf between them represented more than just a personal difference, rather it expressed the most fundamental oppositions in human life, those of reason and nature, of rock and water, of thought and feeling; they are the oppositions also of the male imagination and the female imagination, and of fact and vision. Woolf's state of mind in 1939–41, however, is seen as part of the mental and psychological history of an entire nation; there could be nothing "mad" about fearing death, destruction, social isolation, and loss of context or of friends in the horrors of war. Death by water, at one's own pace, may have been the saner alternative to death by shrapnel.

In recent years there have been various attempts to understand Woolf's suicide as a justification of her life, even its apotheosis, and in so doing, to say something about her work and its meaning. Earlier accounts of the suicide were solemn, and there was often an implied suggestion that this sensitive lyrical writer found herself unequal to the demands of life in wartime—a severe censure—and that it was the ominous price paid by sensitivity in a world torn by more than just the precise imperatives of art. This underlined the *Scrutiny* critique of her work with its energetic condemnation of her for being privileged, for not having children, not being working class or healthy, a sort of games-mistress style of literary criticism which has endured into our own day. In this perspective, the sui-

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cide was simply the culmination of a life and work pursued too finely at too delicate a level of organization, and in circumstances of too great comfort.

Ever since the beginning of the Woolf revival of the past decade, however, there has been a noticeable change in the way the suicide is regarded, a change which coincides with, and is related to, a different conception of Woolf 's work, and an entirely revised sense of Woolf 's exemplary role as a "woman of letters," as the title of Phyllis Rose's biography styles her. Woolf was acclaimed as a modernist fifty years ago (she was on the cover of *Time* in the thirties) and, with Joyce, Proust, Lawrence, and others, she has for decades been placed in the innovative experimental lyrical tradition of the modern novel. Only much later has she been read for her acute response to the social and political life around her, of which she was thought to be hopelessly ignorant. Even Leonard Woolf had said she was probably the most apolitical animal since Aristotle invented the term, and, following this lead, both her partisans and her detractors have ignored her striking gift for social analysis which was exercised from the beginning in her letters and diary.

What Rose means to do with the title of course is to draw attention to Woolf 's varied works and her great productivity, in letters, journals, novels, essays, memoirs, biographies, stories. A writer who was apparently never not writing, she worked on novel or essay in the mornings, on typing and revisions in the afternoons, wrote letters and diary between tea and dinner, and even sometimes after dinner; she wrote when traveling, she wrote when ill, she wrote from the nursing home; her collected works will encompass probably fifty volumes! Woolf also had a place in the world of letters, not as a secret dissident or maverick figure, not a housewife-poet or a hermit or sibyl, nor a performer, nor—like George Eliot—first an outcast and then a pillar of propriety, nor like Mrs. Oliphant, or countless other women of the nineteenth century, writing to support a family. Woolf explicitly adopted the literary profession, and, thanks to her Quaker aunt, she had £500 a year to live on modestly, and at a time and under circumstances which permitted this professional commitment. The feminism which the past decade has discovered in Woolf thus enlarged the reputation of an already considerable writer, already a modernist, experimental writer securely placed in the modern tradition. When the novels are read with an awareness of the social and political understanding embedded in their fictional structures, it becomes clear why Rose designates her "woman of letters."

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That three new biographical studies should have seemed necessary and desirable within seven years of Bell's two-volume work is a telling indication of the way Woolf's accomplishment has been reinterpreted. Recent critics have abandoned the official persona bequeathed to them, contradicted the assessments of Woolf's nephew and husband, and the entire complex of Bloomsbury gossip, impressions, and reminiscences. Rose does not go quite so far in revising earlier images but she nevertheless finds Woolf's feminism not a change in direction or a late aberration but an intensification of attitudes developed early in relation to early experiences, discernible in her work from the very beginning, and confirmed by circumstances. The explicit challenging mockery of patriarchal society was certainly to be seen in Woolf's letters and writing as early as 1910, in letters to her friends long before, and in the famous *Dreadnought* hoax, that event so lovingly cherished by Bloomsbury, when a group of them dressed up as Abyssinian royalty, boarded a British ship, the pride of the Home Fleet, and deceived the assembled naval personnel, mocking the authority they represented. The joke has often seemed merely an extreme instance of Bloomsbury camp, but Rose discusses it in the context of Woolf's early attitudes toward society and toward the traditional novel, an original view which makes the whole affair seem more plausible than it ever has.

Rose, too, seeing in Woolf an anguished speaker not being heeded, interprets the suicide not as an act of insanity, but as a "supreme and final attempt at discipline," observing how the notes were rewritten with care to achieve an exactness of expression, and she imagines how the act must have been contemplated as a solution to some terrible division in her spirit. Others have seen the suicide as Woolf's prevision of a universal failure to achieve an androgynous vision, that union of masculine and feminine qualities of mind and imagination which, according to Woolf, characterizes Coleridge and other "great minds" and their works. Or, it has been suggested, she feared hearing voices again, and all the rest of the "madness" of 1913–15, which also occurred at the beginning of wartime, a period in which, like the mad young man of *Mrs. Dalloway,* she had to let others take over. A more psychological or even psychosexual explanation would point to menopause and its obvious dangers for someone of fragile emotional health, especially a childless woman isolated and out of contact with her milieu. And a creative person, frequently in a precarious state after the completion of something, as Woolf was in 1941, having just finished *Be-*

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tween the Acts, was even more vulnerable, but these speculations do not emphasize the deliberateness or control which have recently been seen in her suicide. What seems striking is that no other way of freeing herself appeared to be available and the reader may wonder why not, or may wonder what existing alternatives had disappeared from the previously maintained balance of Woolf's mind during the twenty-five years since her well-documented insanity of 1913–15, because although often troubled after that period, she had never fully abandoned direction of herself and her work.

Whether or not we can account for Woolf's suicide in terms of possible causation or precipitating events, there is really no way it can be called an act of affirmation, despite the evidence of deliberate planning and control in the writing and rewriting of suicide notes. Indeed, the very delay, the deliberateness, are signs that other alternatives were considered and rejected, that if, in the common phrase, the balance of her mind were disturbed, there must have been forces attempting to restore that balance, and those forces could find no expression or direction. It was entirely a terrible waste and loss, and although a retrospective view can link it with what had gone before, this final act of self-destruction was in no way inevitable or a consummate act, an apotheosis. Furthermore, suicide was a very old idea for Woolf, not precipitated by later events but active in her mind from childhood on. Long before her marriage, she and Vanessa used to argue about it, and even earlier, as a girl, it was comtemplated as a possible act, a gesture consonant with her self. This needs to be explored further but certainly not celebrated.

Mitchell Leaska, in his excellent study of the novels, observes the atmosphere of death which began to surround the Woolfs in the thirties, with the deaths of so many close friends, relatives and associates. Actual deaths, such as those of Strachey in 1932, of Carrington, of Roger Fry, of Lowes Dickinson; of her nephew, Julian Bell, killed in Spain; of her two half-brothers; the ending of close relationships; the bombing of the Woolfs' London house; their isolation in Sussex, and news of sudden deaths from the bombings, all can account for a preoccupation with death. Suicide too had been explicitly on their minds: Leonard had a supply of gasoline, so they could both commit suicide in case of invasion, and Woolf's brother had provided them with some morphine as well. The loss of old attachments surely colored the years when Woolf's last two

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novels were written. Leaska points out, in his discussion of *The Years,* how the end of her close relationship with Sackville-West came during the writing of the novel, and also how another older attachment to Violet Dickinson, ended long before, was brought back to consciousness in 1936 when Violet returned copies of Woolf's letters from 1902–12. The psychology of those last years is difficult to unravel at best, as is Woolf's expression of her concerns in the late novels. Leaska, unlike many other Woolf critics, does not believe *The Years* to be a fully articulated work of art—the revisions and excisions which mark its development from the early version, *The Pargiters,* excluded too much, he thinks—and, pointing to Woolf's own awareness of its incompleteness, remarks on how much the writing of it must have stirred up the emotions of the past for her, recreating father, mother, and family of earlier days, and exhuming, reviving, rekindling the old conflicts and the old emotions, the passionate attachments of childhood amid those of the present. Leaska suggests that the recreation of the past also revived a sense of guilt about the past, which could be expiated only by some punishment, and, he implies, it was a judgment she would execute upon herself. It must be explanations and hypotheses of this kind, valuable and insightful as they are, that prompt some critics to ignore the biographical material, as Hermione Lee does, announcing at the beginning of her book on Woolf's novels, "This is not a book about Bloomsbury, lesbianism, madness or suicide . . . " and even to distance herself from Woolf's feminism, from her essays, her work at the Hogarth Press, and in the course of analysing the novels to avoid the use of almost everything that is known about Woolf's life and opinions. That can hardly be done anymore, though, nor can the ambience be ignored, now that a wealth of thorough literary analysis can be found for every single one of Woolf's novels, and when perceptive critics have researched so many aspects of the various published texts and the earlier versions of them.

When Woolf's mother died in 1895, the death rate for women aged 45-54 was 14.8, little changed from the death rate fifty years earlier; it was thus not an uncommon occurrence throughout the nineteenth century for the forty-nine-year-old mother of a family to die, when medical resources were so limited. The death rate for males was higher, but Leslie Stephen was a healthy man, despite his complaining and his fragile childhood; he was a mountain climber, determinedly "manly," scorning the "morbid," and he

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could wear out those around him. In the year Julia died, the death rate for his age group was 34.9, so it is testimony to his strong constitution, and to her overwork and strain, that *she* died of influenza and not he in that year. When his own time came, it was not until he was seventy-two, in 1904, when the death rate was 65.5, so he was still a phenomenon to have lasted that long. The Victorian family knew death intimately from the very beginning of life, when the death rate for children aged 0-4 was never lower than 61 throughout the nineteenth century and often as high as 76 and 77.3. Woolf has spoken of her mother's death as the greatest possible disaster, and in her 1939-40 memoir she traced much of the sadness of her own life to this event, and her sympathetic critics have adopted her view. She has also observed that Julia's sudden death marked the beginning of unreality, acknowledging candidly in her memoir—and using it in the fiction of the Pargiter family in *The Years*—that she felt almost nothing about her mother's death at the time, and was more affected by the dreadful histrionics that occupied her father. The unreality, the falsity of feeling, the excessive demonstrative lugubrious miasma which descended upon 22 Hyde Park Gate was extreme. Henry James, among others, commented on the funereal atmosphere, and pitied the children. But Woolf's childhood, like that of any late Victorian, had been full of deaths long before Julia's, and long after. Her maternal grandparents died in 1887 and 1892, her mother's sister Adeline (for whom she was named) died in 1881, shortly before Woolf's birth; Adeline's husband in 1885, leaving the Vaughan cousins orphans; her eleven Fisher cousins lost their father the year before Leslie Stephen died, and one of the Fisher cousins had died the year before that; on the Stephen side, the Stephen cousins had lost their father the year before Julia died, and the "mad" cousin, Jem, had died in 1892, and there were other deaths of relatives and acquaintances occurring all the time, such as in 1904, the husband of one of the Symonds girls, and the sister-in-law of the dead Stella's fiancé. Death was all around Woolf, all through her childhood and early youth. Pondering these deaths, in the context of the Victorian family, and especially in this particular Victorian family, what seems interesting is that Woolf gave a central place in her legend to their effect on her sense of reality. In fact, what she mourned was not so much her mother's loss but her own lack of feeling, and, in a late Victorian milieu when grief became an expressive fulfillment for those surrounded by death, even a sought-out indulgence, this was

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a serious deficiency. Interesting also is that Woolf, who identified with her father's vocation, forty-five years later identified with his style of elaborating and dramatizing the loss of her mother, and placing it at the center of *her* psychic life.

Thus, when the series of attachments and losses in Woolf's life is considered, the fact that such losses were exceedingly familiar to any late Victorian family makes Woolf's own intensity about specific attachments the more significant: she distanced herself from what has been called the late Victorian "pornography of death," but was not without the capacity for intense emotional display herself, as her childhood history amply demonstrates. It would be interesting to know which of Woolf's subsequent attachments exhibited similar proportions of absence and fantasy, of "making up." The discontinuity between events and the intense feelings about those events was of course characteristic of late nineteenth-century forms of emotional involvement. It was the subject of philosophical and religious speculation, of imaginative writing, and of the new psychological and psychiatric investigations, for example, Freud's. We know Woolf maintained a lifelong attachment to her sister, Vanessa, older by three years. They were rarely apart, shared all their childhood and youth, and despite occasional misunderstandings, they seem never to have been estranged, hardly even distant from one another in the usual manner of grown women. This of course is not to say that it was an attachment without fantasy; in fact, in all attachments, the element of fantasy is very strong, whether it is in the explicit imaginings or merely the implicit tone, or the fragmentary expressions which point to unexpressed ideas. Thus, we register something, in reading Woolf's early letters to her cousin, Emma Vaughan, whom she addresses as "Dearest Reptile" or "My dearest Toad," or "Beloved Animals, and Cousins" to two Vaughan sisters, and signed "Yr. loving Goat." We note the tone of these animal nicknames and what they suggest of the relationships. Woolf was "Goat" or "B. Goat" or "Goatus" or "B." to her sister, brothers, half-brothers, and cousins, even forty years later. The attachment to Stella is known only through Woolf's own published memoirs and in the fragmentary records of Stella's unpublished diary; it was reportedly ambivalent but filial/maternal, with Stella comforting the young Virginia, taking her out for drives recommended by the doctor when the girl became "nervous," keeping track of "Ginia's" menstrual periods, and other kinds of attentiveness. Her death was, to Woolf, terrible, but she was not kept alive

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in fantasy, except as an image of romantic love. Woolf herself had no animal nickname for Stella, but, curiously enough, Julia Stephen called this very handsome daughter "Old Cow." After Stella's death, Violet Dickinson, a kindly family friend, seventeen years older than Woolf, became an affectionate quasi-maternal counselor, a guide to worldly life, a thoughtful mentor, and one who encouraged Woolf's literary ambitions, putting her in touch with her first editors, and reading her early efforts, traveling with the Stephens, advising, and remaining close to Woolf until her marriage, even giving her a cradle as a wedding present. To Violet, Woolf would repeatedly write such things as "You are the only sympathetic person in the world," and "I wish you were a Kangaroo and had a pouch for small Kangaroos to creep to" and "My wallaby paws stick to the paper as I write" scattered throughout letters of thoughtful description, amusing reports of excursions, analysis of her own and others' characters, and bits of gossip. Violet stood by during all the long months of Leslie Stephen's illness and later it was Violet who took Woolf to recuperate at her own house when Vanessa could not cope with Woolf's strange "mad" behavior. It was at Violet's house that Woolf heard the birds speaking in Greek and heard Edward VII in the shrubbery speaking obscentities, and it was there too that Woolf apparently threw herself from a window. Over the ten years of their close friendship, Violet was addressed as "My woman," "My child," or "My Violet," in letters signed by "Sparroy," "Yrs. AVS," "Yr. Sp."

For Madge Vaughan, Woolf as a young girl felt a kind of ecstatic infatuation, trembling with excitement when Madge came to visit at 22 Hyde Park Gate. Madge, a daughter of John Addington Symonds, and intensely devoted to him, wrote about Italy (*Days Spent on a Doge's Farm, Story of Perugia,* etc.), was emotional, imaginative, affectionate, thirteen years older than Woolf, very literary; she married one of Woolf's Vaughan cousins, Will, later the public school headmaster, the very type of decent, pompous, proper Victorian. In Woolf's eyes he dominated and exploited Madge, and, although early letters to her are girlishly affectionate, addressed to "Dearest Mama Vaughan" from "your infant," and Woolf was a little bit in love with them and their babies and their life in the country, she gradually lost interest in them. Lady Nelly Cecil, a friend of Violet's, was another of Woolf's correspondents in those early years, but she was not a part of the fantasy world, had no animal nickname, and, in writing to her, Woolf adopted no animal or

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child personae but expressed only respect, interest, affection, and a kind of well-bred, civilized intelligent spirit, not the posturing or the adoration or the small animal kinship that characterised so much of her correspondence. The language of tender furry animals was of course the magic fantasy language of the nursery, of fairy tales, of Beatrix Potter stories, of the sanctuary of childhood which was both physically and psychologically insulated from the world outside. Woolf obviously kept that language alive—and those cozy emotions as well—using it for her expressive language of attachment.

Of the early attachments, only the link to Vanessa survived into Woolf's maturity. Thoby, the brother who was between the two girls, adored and revered, died in 1905, and was kept alive in fantasy by Woolf probably until she wrote *The Waves,* just as, according to her report, she kept her mother alive in fantasy at least until the writing of *To the Lighthouse.* Adrian, the younger brother, was never adored, indeed was a cumbersome annoyance to Woolf almost all her life, something of a bore, helpless, hopeless, always a little boy, "an empty suit of clothes." She never felt for him or his wife or children anything like her attachment for Vanessa and Clive Bell and their children, and Duncan Grant, Vanessa's lover. Others in Woolf's life, the "lions" of Leon Edel's book, and those tangential to them, received and wrote the letters in all their volumes, and were part of her circle, but never touched her imagination; later in her life only Victoria Sackville-West could be considered a serious attachment.

When Vanessa married Clive Bell, Woolf at twenty-five developed a flirtation with him, which she referred to in later years as "my affair with Nessa and Clive." When Vanessa had an affair with Roger Fry, and long after it, Woolf became attached to Fry, and wrote his biography in 1938–40. When Vanessa left Clive and began to live with the painter, Duncan Grant, Woolf, now older and less given to such intense flirtations, became coolly devoted to Duncan. Earlier she had been a little bit "in love" with Gwen Darwin and Jacques Raverat, as an image of sexual love, and still earlier, the image of Stella and her fiancé had affected her profoundly. And, after Stella's death, when Vanessa and Stella's fiancé fell in love, and the taboo about the deceased wife's sister was still conscientiously observed, the young Virginia felt her loyalties torn by still another image of passion. Of Vanessa's marriage, she wrote to Violet "there will be all Nessa's life to look forward to"; the night

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before the wedding she referred to as "our last night" and promised to accept gracefully the permanent separation from Vanessa. Later she would write to Clive "Kiss my yellow honeyBee," "Kiss my old Tawny, on all her private places—kiss her eyes, and neck socket" or "Kiss my sister. 'Clive whats that letter about? O these Authoresses!' " or "Whisper into your wife's ear that I love her," in which the tone is a mixture of her own flirting with Clive, her assertion of the old attachment to Vanessa, and a kind of threat to Clive to respect her prior claim. It was also to include a tone of loving witty mockery of Vanessa.

What of the half-sister, Laura, twelve years older, "mad" from childhood, part of the Hyde Park Gate family until Woolf was nine? What of the half-brothers, twelve and fourteen years older than Woolf? Did they really molest her, those Duckworth boys, and would it clarify anything about her attachments if they had done so? Modern readers, schooled by Freud, recall the fantasies of seduction in Freud's early patients, just around the same time. Such fantasies would not have been surprising, in a late Victorian girl hedged in by repression of feeling and shame about the body. One imagines the setting, the dark ugly seven-storied house in Kensington, the seventeen or more people living there, the other daily help, the one bath and three W.C.'s, the emotions contained and expressed and exculpated, the handsome older half-brothers from another marriage, itself fascinating, the sexual atmosphere unacknowledged but potent. One imagines the young Virginia, nervous in the late Victorian style, impressionistic, observant, very limited in her life experience: a girl who had never gone to school, had only a few cousins for friends, never went to church or Sunday School, educated haphazardly by parents and governesses, knowing about the world only through books. Those memoirs in which she speaks of seduction and molestation were read in the early twenties to the Memoir Club, a Bloomsbury creation whose members were committed to sexual and aesthetic iconoclasm. Given Woolf's passion for "making up," it is not hard to see her in 1920 addressing her canny audience with the picture of George as the proper Kensington young man by day and the incestuous seducer by night. Keynes thought it was the best thing she had done: "You should pretend to write about real people and make it all up." What could be more shocking about a young "eminent Victorian" than incest?[2]

[2] And what could be a more appropriate riposte in the rivalry with Lytton Strachey? His essays, published to great acclaim in 1918, never approached quite so closely to their sub-

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And yet one recalls also that in Freud's early case of Dora, the adults around her actually *were* engaged in complicated adulteries and deceptions, she was not making it up. Incest, too, was not unknown, and, in a period when children were isolated in the family and controlled by a system of deference, it might be a potent and genuinely threatening possibility. Having a "mad" sister was not uncommon then, nor a "mad" cousin ("Jem" and Hervey and Arthur Fisher) nor, as recent work in women's history tells us, a "mad" wife. Or, thinking at random of other impossibilities, is it reasonable that an Oxford mathematician should be obsessed with little girls, taking pictures of them *sans habilement,* as he put it, romping in his studio or in the garden, their parents heartily approving, no impropriety, only a passion for art photography? It *was* possible. Or that a young man of twenty-three, a future Archbishop of Canterbury, should fall in love with a girl of eleven, and could hardly wait until she was eighteen to marry her? Or that a brilliant headmaster of Harrow, Arnold's disciple, a great preacher, preparing boys for confirmation, an example to the prefects, should resign at the height of his career "for no apparent reason," entangled in homosexual affairs with students? Or that a great art historian and social thinker should go mad with passion for a young girl? Or that a great Prime Minister should be obsessed by the spiritual welfare of young prostitutes? Or that the greatest nineteenth-century students of capitalist oppression and domination were themselves engaged in relationships of sexual exploitation? All these things were possible and did happen, and so much more of the same kind that the reader pauses: can what was in fact happening in any apparently decent Victorian or Edwardian family be called fantasy? As for the less decent, the less respectable, the great unwashed, we know from the increasingly detailed studies of social historians that every sort of oppression, sexual exploitation, domestic tyranny, and unimaginable behavior was occurring all the time.

During Woolf's young womanhood in Bloomsbury various young and middle-aged men were in her ambience. There was of course Lytton Strachey, with whom she had a close friendship until his death in 1932, and Walter Headlam, at Kings College, Cambridge, and Hilton Young, Saxon Sydney-Turner, Sidney Waterlow, and other friends of Thoby's from Cambridge, future diplomats, civil servants, scholars, all very interesting to the young

jects, nor quite so daringly, as Woolf's memoir did. And, after the "madness" of 1913–15, she could be expected—and permitted—to say anything.

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woman who was thinking deeply about marriage and life. But none of them was part of her passionate history, none could be called an attachment in the other sense, not even Strachey who proposed, as if in an obligatory scene from a French drama, and then immediately retracted his offer. She of course married another of Thoby's friends, Leonard Woolf, and formed a relationship called by Ian Parsons and George Spater "a marriage of true minds." This was to be a relationship of the most complex kind, lasting nearly thirty years, based on profound affection, independence, devotion, and intimacy, although there were to be grave emotional and sexual incompatibilities between them. They shared tastes, interests, occupations, friends, the Hogarth Press. Leonard's care of her from her first illness in 1913–15 throughout her life was indeed saintly, despite whatever else has been asserted about it, such as that he was manipulative, that he treated her as a child or patient, failed to understand her, consulted with doctors and relatives behind her back, and that his rationalistic controlled unemotional approach toward her and toward his own emotional life set up a fateful antagonism between them. Photographs of him from those early days after their marriage show a terribly bewildered thoughtful desperate young man: Virginia's mental illness was then thought to be incurable. Obviously only his "management" of her illness, his careful, methodical, scientific observation of its onset, its symptoms, its course and its remedies, only his patient fidelity could have kept her from the asylums or from total invalidism at home, a fate not uncommon in that period of still-primitive psychiatric knowledge. That they were deeply attached is quite clear, although it differed from the other profound attachments of Woolf's life. From Leonard she got the kind of nourishing devotion and care which she felt she had always been seeking, and, at the same time, his very rationalism, his analytical habits of mind, his adherence to the world of fact rather than the world of vision, all enlisted him on the other side of the barricades, in a shifting alliance with her image of the tyrannical Victorian father, buttressed by the obdurate and intransigent forces of society, despite Leonard's socialism, his Jewish origins and his distance from the forces of Empire, Crown, and Church. That Leonard may not have belonged there at all was an injustice Woolf's own habits of mind were willing to tolerate, but the contradiction was of course part of what troubled her at the end of her life.

She wrote him very few letters. They were rarely apart, except

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when she was in a nursing home during her episodes of "madness," or when one of them was traveling, which was infrequent. After they were married she wrote to Leonard as a mandrill to a mongoose, in that tone of animal identification characteristic of her attachments, and in contrast to the witty acerbic perceptive style of her first letters to him, especially unlike the sober somewhat mordant style of the 1912 letters in which she tried to decide whether to marry him. Later, in the twenties, she would write out of a love in which she imagined herself as a collection of animals, marmots, monkeys or moles all claiming attention: "Down marmots!" and "I can't hear myself speak for their chatter" and "Lord! how I adore you! and you only think of me as a bagfull of itching monkeys, and ship me to the Indies with indifference!" and "Poor Mandril does adore your every hair of your little body and hereby puts in a claim for an hour of antelope kissing the moment she gets back." In spite of this tone, it is still hard to imagine what they were like together, and the references to Leonard in her letters to others are so varied and complex that no characterization seems apt. She will report that Leonard forced her to give up the idea of motherhood and that she had no power to oppose him, but her descriptions of their life together and their recreations suggest a companionable affectionate tolerant and kindly relation between them:

> No, I don't think L. or I "snarl"—we analyse each others' idiosyncrasies . . . in the light of psychoanalysis walking around the square . . .
>
> L. is as usual a perfect angel; he carried my bed up, wraps his own silk dressinggown around me, and cooks dinner and prunes his trees, and does every single thing just when I thought he wd. have a fortnight's holiday: What a curse I am to him, to be sure!

Quotations from the letters do not adequately present the cumulative effect of their thirty years of working and living together, nor the intertwined strands of her various attachments in relation to one another.

The curious friendship with the composer and conductor Ethel Smyth cannot quite be called an attachment—it was really more of a repulsion. Woolf was dazzled and shocked by this rambunctious elderly woman who became violently attached to *her*, bombarding her with letters, visits, gifts, phone calls, requests, invitations, personal demands. Woolf liked it at first, and responded to the powerful attack, the invasion of her privacy, the egotism, the

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noise, the belligerent style. She called Ethel a wild boar, a savage sow with burr-tangled hoary hide, an uncastrated cat, as Ethel attempted to involve her in an increasingly contentious, prickly, angry sensitivity, but Ethel's challenge to her called forth a series of amazing letters, direct and open, digging into personal history, defending and examining herself. Woolf amazingly recalls her feelings of earlier decades, plumbs her own personal sexual history, reflects on her illness and on her feelings about Leonard and about marrying a Jew. Ethel could not become the kind of beneficent presence Woolf seemed to require, however; her ferocious attacks and incessant demands were wearying, so after the early openness, Woolf 's letters are full of excuses putting her off, retreats from the earlier intimacy, mingled with gentle remonstrance and thoughtful criticism of Ethel's writing. The relationship had in it, on Woolf 's part at least, nothing very affectionate about it, or erotic, although as an example Ethel was intriguing, in her valiant unorthodox career as a musician, and she commanded respect in her life as an independent woman.

The story of Woolf 's involvement with her sister has yet to be written but it is the attachment of her life that is most extensively documented. Woolf wrote to Vanessa almost daily, even if she were nearby, lengthy descriptive letters, amusing, thoughtful, vivid, full of posturing, taunting, and teasing; joyous, wry, bitter, lively and immediate; every letter is so vibrant, so full of insight and resonance, such insouciant virtuousity, such complex impish or even flirtatious expressiveness that the reader becomes thoughtfully aware of the strength and intricacy of this attachment. Addressing Vanessa as "Beloved," or "Dearest Dolphin" (*her* animal persona), Woolf writes ironically as if her sister were too much immersed in her own rich life to pay attention to her, and this was a tone she adopted throughout her life, from 1908—"Monster that you are—I adore you"—to 1927—"But my love for you remains hot and strong: yours for me thin and weak"; from 1904—"Nessa contrived to say that it didn't matter much to anyone, her included, I suppose, whether I was here [in Cambridge, recuperating from 'madness'] or in London, which made me angry, but then she has a genius for stating unpleasant truths in her matter of fact voice!"—to " . . . but not a word will I tell you, not a word—unless you write to me. I'm not going to hope to see you before October. I don't say 'wish'—I say 'hope'. Life has taught me these lessons" and " . . . please love me—I'm such a darling—and getting very wild without you" of 1935. It was the assumption of their relationship

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that Vanessa never wrote letters, was a silent maternal figure of nature and passion, submerged in the heart of life, with her children, her painting, her lovers, leaving Virginia outside in the role of hopeless adoring cavalier, victim of unrequited love: "He [Clive] grudges, not your affection for me, which doesn't exist, but mine for you—" and "I'm off to Sibyl to meet Noel Coward, with whom I'm slightly in love—Why? / But with you I am deeply passionately, unrequitedly in love—."

The nature of the attachment is striking, and a critic is challenged to find terms for it—more than sororal, mockingly filial on Woolf's part. Vanessa did not, for Woolf, simply replace their mother, and even if she had done so, the relationships would have been complicated. It was hardly a contemporary nuclear family, that community at 22 Hyde Park Gate, and we cannot just speedily make a translation from Woolf's attachments to our own familiar experience in the modern small family. The mother who presided over that community was remote even when she was alive; fantasy and "making up" would have been essential even to a very young member of it, considering the distance and absence of its central figure. As the oldest of the Stephen children, Vanessa was forced into a certain executive role coping with the volatile and unpredictable younger sister after Leslie Stephen's death and during Virginia's apparent "madness" in 1904. Woolf accepted her in that role but always challenged her authority, pretending to flirt with other possibilities, adopting for herself other roles. Woolf, in letters to her, began to present herself early as a collection of irrepressible monkeys—"the *singes*"—and varied this theme with "Apekin," "the apes," "the *singerie*," "the Apes kiss you." The animal personae appear in all Woolf's letters but in the letters to Vanessa it is the primitive irrational uncontrollable animalic aspect that is prominent, as compared with the poor bird or baby kangaroo of the letters to Violet Dickinson, and the pathetic tender lemur, Bosman's Potto, of the letters to Vita Sackville-West. Obviously the response of the person addressed by these kangaroos, mandrills, birds, monkeys or lemurs must have confirmed and stimulated such identification, reinforcing the precise quality of the attachments. And Leon Edel's deft, polished Jamesian consideration of the early Bloomsbury milieu, and especially of this relationship against that background, provides an oblique perspective on Woolf's attachments in their entangled relation with the others.

Should Woolf's attachments be characterized as homosexual?

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Bloomsbury of course welcomed homosexuality, as it encouraged and even ostensibly fostered all forms of iconoclastic speech and behavior, except what was boring or too reminiscent of Kensington and Belgravia. (Whenever Woolf invited anyone for the weekend, she always added "Bring no clothes," meaning of course not that they went naked but that they didn't dress for dinner.) There was nothing very revolutionary about homosexuality, however; it had long been an upper-class and aristocratic recreation, abundantly pursued in public school, university and the professions as well. For women in the late nineteenth century, close friendships clearly offered a kind of society and social elaboration to replicate what women were excluded from by the exclusive masculine domination of social institutions, and by the intense friendships among men which formed the basis of those institutions. Lesbianism, the more explicitly sexual form of intense female friendship, was accommodated quite as easily as male homosexuality to the prevailing property relations of late Victorian and Edwardian life, and indeed never excited the denunciation or the opprobruim that the feminist movement did, because, like male homosexuality indulged in as an individual sexual preference, lesbianism did not in any way threaten the complex structure of society and did not have to do so.

Sackville-West, Woolf's great attachment, offers a most interesting example of the sexual accommodation available in the complex structure of English social life. A writer, and daughter of an ancient illustrious line, she was excluded from the inheritance of Knole, that magnificent and historic property, because she was a woman. Both the legal exclusion, which she did not contest,[3] and her own natural inheritance of grandeur, romance, and power, appealed immensely to Woolf. Her dramatic life and looks were a kind of defiance of those patriarchal institutions which might ignore her claims but could not repress her vitality, nor curtail her means of expressing it. Woolf responded to her personally and as a figure, not as a writer. She wrote a friend about Sackville-West,

> . . . and why she writes, which she does with complete competency, and a pen of brass, is a puzzle to me. If I were she, I should merely stride, 11 Elk hounds behind me, through my ancestral woods.

Woolf envied her air of command, her motherhood, her powerful arrogant proprietary grasp of pleasure, comfort and beauty. Sack-

[3] As has often been observed, Woolf, in writing *Orlando*, was the one who contested it, giving Knole to her friend for all time.

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ville-West took pride in her long and happy marriage with Harold Nicolson, the diplomat and writer, also a homosexual, but she had no interest in his career or in politics; she was entirely absorbed in her historical novels, her poetry, gardening, restoration of ancient barns and castles, in her children, her travels, her circle of upper-class women. Like innumerable male members of the upper-class and aristocracy, she had an established marriage, a social position, heirs, and all the while maintained an active homosexual life. Like them, her children went to Eton and Oxford, and one became a publisher (and the editor with Joanne Trautmann of Woolf's letters) and the other an art historian and the respected editor of the *Burlington Magazine*. Not since 1919–20, when Sackville-West "eloped" to Paris with a woman friend, had she tried to change the world, and it is almost unbelievably ironic that during her one gesture of profound revolt, Nicolson was himself in Paris, working on the Versailles Treaty!

Despite Woolf's taunting of her sister for continuing to prefer heterosexual love—in jocular disdain, Woolf exclaims "What an arid garden the world must be for you! What avenues of stone pavements and iron railings!" conjuring up, surely, the vistas of Kensington!—Sackville-West's "Sapphic" circle was perhaps too high-powered, too intense for her. In a much quoted letter, Sackville-West mentions that she feared arousing Woolf's sexual feelings because of the threat of madness, so she kept for Woolf a different kind of affection, distinct from the more explicitly lesbian relationships she maintained at the same time. Furthermore, this attachment, like many others, was as much filial as homosexual, even if Woolf was the younger one, meeting her perpetual longing for a tender maternal kind of care. In the letters, she often speaks of parties where she "flirted" with such people as Lady Ottoline Morrell, Lady Cunard, Lady Aberconway, or Sibyl Colefax, and she was acutely aware of the interest these women had for her, writing of it most perceptively in "Am I A Snob?" in *Moments of Being*. And she seems also to have liked a kind of avuncular flirtation with young women such as those who came to work at the Hogarth Press, and young men like William Plomer, John Lehmann, Angus Davidson, Raymond Mortimer, Roger Senhouse, Stephen Spender, Ralph Partridge, who came and left in rapid succession as helpers, writers, partners in the Press, friends of friends, young people she and Leonard met when they visited at Oxford and Cambridge. None of these flirtations, however, absorbed much of Woolf's attention compared to the profound feel-

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ings evoked in the few filial/maternal attachments which endured throughout her life. All such attachments of course defy text-book designation, expressing rather the power of a diffuse unbounded libidinal energy, more or less available in various relations of life, assuming various forms, and very intricately entangled with an earlier history. If the sexual lives of any modernist writers are offered for comparison—Lawrence, Woolf's close contemporary, Colette, Proust, Mann, Joyce—a similarly labile emotional disposition is evident in all of them.

"Dearest Creature," Woolf addressed Sackville-West, echoing Steele to his wife two centuries earlier, "Dearest shaggy creature," or "Dearest honey," or "Dearest Mrs. Nick." She also called her "donkey-West," and "a dear old rough-coated sheep dog," and referred to herself as "Potto," the adoring lemur always the supplicant. "Lord I wish I were less fond of you! I hate being anxious; I hate being away. And why were you so splenetic? Haint you got Harold? So what do Potto and Virginia matter?" and "Please Vita dear don't forget your humble creatures" and ". . . Never will you shake me off, try as you may." When she doesn't hear from Vita, she speaks in the third person of Potto's melancholy, or with elaborate mock solemnity of Potto's death "because Mrs. Nick has deserted us." This note alternates with the more explicit appeal of "Should you say, if I rang you up to ask, that you were fond of me? If I saw you would you kiss me?" and "Do you really love me? Much? passionately not reasonably?"

Despite their strong attachment, they never seem to have thought of actually living together, dissolving their marriages, or changing anything in their lives, not even yearning in a romantic way for the impossible. As a young woman, Virginia had wanted to live "vehemently," it was part of what she was seeking before she married, and it was why she couldn't marry Strachey or any of the young men courting her at the time. In *The Years* the wish had been transformed into the wish to "live differently" but Woolf herself never organized her own life differently. Only the young Stephens' departure from old patriarchal Kensington to Bloomsbury pointed to a different life. Marriage was really just a more private version of Bloomsbury life, however, and when Woolf became ill, the marriage modified the Bloomsbury form but without essential change. Later, in Hogarth House, in Sussex or in the various Bloomsbury squares, she was not living "differently," it was always very much the same. It was the life lived by Strachey, Keynes,

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E. M. Forster, by all their friends—work, lunch, tea, walking in the country, a London life of lunch, tea, dinner, theatre, parties, the occasional trip to France or Greece or some exotic place, writing letters, reading, tea on the lawn in fine weather, weekend visitors. What would living differently mean? Different relations with people? A different status in life, a different profession, sex, identity, in a different time or place? *Orlando* expressed some of this, and later, *Three Guineas* would express more. Woolf did not seek out the female equivalent of sailors, bus conductors, Arab boys, or students which for Englishmen so often substituted an experience of sexual distance for a more profound social need. Socialism itself could express the wish that all of society might live differently, but it was clearly not the socialism of the Fabians or of Blue Books, Royal Commissions or party politics, or of Left Book Club pretensions to working-class consciousness. If property, power, sexuality, and social institutions were in a different relation to one another, if one were attached to people and to life in a different way, that would be living differently, but how was it to come about? These were Woolf's preoccupations in the thirties and up to the time of her suicide.

During 1939–40, as the war came closer, Woolf began to write some autobiographical sketches again. It was not a new form for her: she had used it in 1907, to write "Reminiscences" for Vanessa's unborn child, in the twenties she had written "22 Hyde Park Gate" and "Old Bloomsbury" to be read before the Memoir Club, in 1936 she had written "Am I a Snob?" and there had been other earlier efforts. In "A Sketch of the Past," she takes a more sombre look at the events and attachments of her life, beginning it in April 1939 and writing the last part only four months before her death. The shadow of the wish to live differently hangs over these autobiographical meditations even perhaps more poignantly than it did in *The Years*, for these are not fictions but Woolf's own memories, and she is trying to construct her own legend. Every great writer does this, weaving together the events of a life and the efforts of imagination, developing a role in life, in relation to others, in auxiliary writing, in the persona presented. We think of Yeats, of Proust, Hemingway, Gertrude Stein, Rilke, of contemporary writers and artists, and their legends constructed to illustrate analogical and anagogical meanings. Woolf often saw herself as Antigone, against the Creons of Victorian society, fearing their power to bury her alive, and "A Sketch of the Past" ends with a set-piece

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about the Victorian family of about 1900: the tea table, its stage, threatening the privacy its dissidents snatched for themselves, convention reigning downstairs and intellect upstairs, the repression of natural feeling, the victimization of women, the duplicity, the distortion, the inexorable power and rapacity and stupidity, the institutionalized violence of society. By the time she wrote this memoir she was only four months from suicide, and almost all the characters were dead—her mother, father, Thoby, Stella, Stella's fiancé, Jack, the Duckworth half-brothers, Gerald and George—those emblems of late Victorian propriety, Kensington respectability, and sexual molestation—all the old family friends from Cornwall were dead, Meredith, James, Symonds, Sidgwick, Watts, Burne-Jones, Lowell were all dead, of the world of intellect and of convention all were gone. Not part of the memoir, but dead too were Fry and Strachey, "Goldie," Carrington, Julian Bell killed in Spain, so many others. Recreating the power of that world, now dead, she examined its power over her own life as the ground of her legend and wondered whether it might have been different. The sexual molestation which had once seemed so important to her, a cause of her unhappiness, was eliminated from the later version of the legend (although many critics fail to make this distinction) and only a single childhood episode remains, its place in Woolf's legend now determined by a complex structure of feelings of shame, desire and guilt.

The reader may ask, why should it matter whether, in the words of Woolf's earlier memoir of 1921, ". . . George Duckworth was not only father and mother, brother and sister to those poor Stephen girls; he was their lover also"? Why should the common reader—with whom Woolf, like Johnson, rejoiced to concur—care about these questions of late Victorian psychology? Woolf herself was only partly a creature of the tea-table, and of the tyranny of the marriage market and the late Victorian seclusion of women; she knew the power of the tyrannical father, and the brothers, but her legend included the denial of that appointed life, the rejection of the claims of that milieu upon her. Refusing to be or heed the Angel in the House, she would not take care of others, but others would take care of her. How important it was that that seductive half-brother had £1,000 a year, and she had only £50! Thus, whether or not the seduction stories are true, whether the half-brothers are included, in an answer to the question of this essay, their place in her legend was crucial and weighty. Although they

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were only brothers from the mother's earlier marriage, and not overly fond of their step-father, in the power of the world of the fathers, they buttressed him—that Kensington Lear in his rages, his irrationality, the enormity of his desires, the eminent writer and man of letters known as "the most lovable of men," the Alpine climber, indefatigable walker, who outlived two wives and a step-daughter, who as a child could not bear harsh words, and if reproved, burst into tears. The brothers served this world of the fathers and would inherit it, and it was the entire network of power which Woolf would not serve. Born to serve it, her dissidence is the more exemplary. Had she been American, she might have been a patient of Dr. S. Weir Mitchell or founded a sect; if Russian, a girl revolutionary. By the time she came to write "A Sketch of the Past," there was more than just Kensington encompassed by the power of the world of the fathers.

Somewhere in the legend Woolf had to find the beginning of her life as a writer. There were moments of horror and shame, there were disjunctions and excesses, feeling going beyond understanding, an intensity of sensation out of proportion to the events provoking it, and there were strange memories and lifelong nightmares and inexplicable fantasies. Most of all there was the power of memory, the power of those feelings, as if all self were submerged by the intense memory that flooded and inhabited the self. This memory and its vividness of unmediated sense experience was at once the force behind misery and the energy that issued in writing. The awful face in the mirror, the chaos streaked with lightning, the seductive encounter, the terrifying perception, the instant comprehension, all retain their power as they are recalled or as they invade the mind without waiting to be summoned, and it was the joining of a memory of the past and a perception in the present that Woolf often called "moments of being." What made her a writer was the desire to account for these moments.

> It is only by putting it into words that I make it whole; this wholeness means that it has lost its power to hurt me; it gives me, perhaps because by doing so I take away the pain, a great delight to put the severed parts together. Perhaps this is the strongest pleasure known to me. It is the rapture I get when in writing I seem to be discovering what belongs with what; making a scene come right; making a character come together.

There is some reason to think that later in her life, the power of these moments, or the intensity of their recall, had changed in rela-

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tion to her own power to "put the severed parts together." Whether the intensity of the memories became too overpowering, or the force that harmonized them took a different form, it is clear that from 1932 on Woolf's immersion in her own past and its meanings was extremely troubling, that the memories were cherished for their reality at the same time that they were rejected for their horror, and it began to seem that her whole writing life was made up of that terrible ambiguity, that her very way of writing, her "making up," put her at risk. The late Victorian family and world with its repressive conventionality, the brutal devouring father, the absent mother of vanished unattainable presence and power, the world they controlled and represented, was even then the world of her deepest love and her most passionate imagining, her most energetic recreating. To summon that world again, and those feelings, to invite that unbounded invasion of sense experience, surrendering the self once more to the empire of the past, was to construct a legend out of the contradictions of the self, challenging the memory of sharpest pain with the remembered reality of intensest pleasure. It was not a legend of herself alone, but of the self in history. Even the best life, the most favored, the most advanced or powerful is distorted by the social and psychological structures of both personal and communal history. This is one of the reasons for the contemporary interest in Woolf, and why she takes a place among other heroic figures of culture, for it was by her art that the contradictions were held in equilibrium, and it was on the larger more resonant stage of history that she pursued her exemplary role.

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ROBERT S. CLARK

Music Chronicle

VERA STRAVINSKY AND ROBERT CRAFT'S IMMENSE COMPILATION, *Stravinsky in Pictures and Documents*,[1] makes accessible to the reader of English a vast amount of raw material about one of the most vivid artistic lives of our century. The pictures—both color and black-and-white, and chosen by the composer's widow from a variety of sources—are plentifully arrayed in rough chronological order between a portrait gallery of Stravinskys and kin in the later nineteenth century and a group taken on the piazzas, canals, and lagoons of Venice during the composer's funeral ceremonies in 1971. The "documentary" material that accompanies them was selected, for the most part, by Robert Craft from letters, diaries, newspaper articles, radio interviews, books of all kinds, and the composer's marginalia in manuscripts, printed matter, and musical scores, and Craft cements all together with captions and text. A "condensed anthological life," he calls what he is doing (for it is *his* doing, and very little the widow's) at one point—and, again, "an album of vignettes."

There is truth in both formulations, but also a modicum of excessive modesty that may be intended to disarm. For what Craft really provides is a loosely constituted ramble through a wide but ill-digested collection of sources, spiced with his own reflections—he draws heavily on his own diaries for the period after 1948, when he became a member of Stravinsky's household—and learning and wit and inside knowledge of the complexities of the composer's private life, the contradictions of his public persona, and the chemistry of his creative process. It is a random sampling, illuminating, disturbing, confusing and intoxicating, of the contents of the formal biography Craft chooses not to write—for now. Yet, in its haphazard way, it is the most comprehensive portrait of the composer's inward and outward life that we have to date.

In this it easily surpasses the standard volume on the subject, Eric Walter White's *Stravinsky, the Composer and His Works*.[2] Published in 1966, the latter comes within five years of encompassing the composer's eighty-nine of life (1882–1971), and within an ace of embracing all of his musical works—only *Requiem Canticles*, the song *The Owl and the Pussycat*, and some instrumentations of Wolf and Bach remained. For its systematic narrative of the events of Stravinsky's public life, and its wealth of information about and musical analysis of his works, White's book stands apart. But Craft's position vis-à-vis the composer was privileged and unique: for a quarter of a century Craft lived with him (or nearby), counseled and cajoled him in matters musical, cultural, and tactical, traveled and con-

[1] STRAVINSKY IN PICTURES AND DOCUMENTS, by *Vera Stravinsky* and *Robert Craft*. Simon and Schuster. $35.00.

[2] University of California Press. $18.50.

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ducted with him, assisted him in many miscellaneous ways, collaborated with him in published writings, interviews, and recording sessions, and more. The Summer 1979 issue of *Musical Quarterly* carries a series of letters from the older to the younger man—" 'Dear Bob(sky)': Stravinsky's Letters to Robert Craft 1944–1949"—that add revealing details about the beginning of that relationship to what the present book and the Stravinsky-Craft books have told us, and the latter's introductory note provides as well a capsule rationalization of the relationship:

> . . . Like everyone who has ever been close to [Stravinsky], I was a factotum. . . . But I did not mind this, for I had also become Stravinsky's Achates.

So the new book is essential reading for the Stravinsky devotee and indeed for the student of Western artistic life in the first six decades of the twentieth century. It is a handsome job, a mite short of quarto size, well designed and printed (though some inconsistencies and a surprising number of typographical errors suggest some haste in its production), and at $35 a decent bargain considering today's book prices. The body of the text is divided into three almost equal parts: "In Russia and Switzerland, 1882–1920," "France, June 1920–September 1939," and "The United States, 1939–1971." Between the first two of these is an "Interlude: Obiter Dicta"—extracts from newspaper interviews from the twenties and thirties, for the most part. A full quarter of the book is taken up by notes and five appendices: the first deals briefly with a legal dispute between publishers over the 1919 *Firebird* Suite; the second's four parts touch in different ways upon *Le Sacre du printemps* and consider Nijinsky as a choreographer, the bluestocking Misia Sert and her mediation of the Stravinsky-Diaghilev feud, an article on the ballet that the composer contributed to *Montjoie!*, a French journal, and revisions to the score;[3] the third and fourth appendices treat the composer's friendship with T. S. Eliot and his politics up to 1947 ("Left, Right, Left" is Craft's descriptive rubric); and the last is a "Selected, Annotated Bibliography of Russian and English Publications since 1971," largely devoted to completing the demolition (begun in 1972 shortly after the book's publication) of Lillian Libman's "personal memoir" *And Music at the Close: Stravinsky's Last Years*, by demonstrating Miss Libman's errors of fact and by undermining the presumption of intimate familiarity with the composer and his retinue upon which the memoir rests. The quantity, variety, and detail of the contents of the principal text as well as the appendices are impressive and diverting, idiosyncratic and invaluable.

Here the composer's remarkable life is spread out before us like a richly colored and intricately figured tapestry. The opening pages are particularly lavish in photographs of Stravinsky's family, the environs of his youth—St. Petersburg, the Western Ukraine, German spas—and his asso-

[3] " . . . Few composers in the whole of music history can have been more constant rewriters than Stravinsky, who changed, emended, corrected his scores practically every time he heard or performed them" (p. 587).

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ciation with his teacher and mentor Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov and his circle. After the success of the Diaghilev Ballets Russes productions of *The Firebird* (1910) and *Petrouchka* (1911), and the notoriety of *Le Sacre* (1913), Stravinsky was internationally lionized, and for the remainder of his life he was to know only one brief period, the years of the Second World War, when he would not be continually shuttling across continents and from metropolis to metropolis to participate as an executant in, to stage, or to witness performances. (As Craft says, "Between the world wars one change . . . was his new career as a performing artist. This was the result of financial necessity but became an artistic one also"—page 214.) A list of his personal and artistic associates during the last five decades of his life reads like a roll call of Parnassians and their fashionable fellow-travelers: Ernest Ansermet, Alexander Benois, Pablo Picasso, André Gide, Jean Cocteau, Alexander Tansman, Serge Koussevitzky, Maurice Ravel, the Princesse Edmond de Polignac (born Winnaretta Singer, of the sewing-machine family), Samuel Dushkin, Charlie Chaplin, Pierre Monteux, Serge Lifar, Stark Young, George Balanchine, W. H. Auden and Chester Kallman, Nicolas Nabokov, Carlos Chavez, Victoria Ocampo, Eugene Berman, Aldous Huxley, Christopher Isherwood, Ingmar Bergman, Rolf Liebermann, Lincoln Kirstein—all of them pass through these pages, and many have their say on the composer and his works. Here, for instance, is Auden in 1971, looking back on a career marked by frequent recantations and changes of style:

> Stravinsky's career as a composer is as good a demonstration as any that I know of the difference between a major and a minor artist. . . . A major artist is always newly finding himself, so that the history of his works recapitulates or mirrors the history of art. Once he has done something to his satisfaction, he attempts to do something he has never done before. (p.449)

This dynamism is a cardinal element in understanding Stravinsky, of course: the composer himself knew early—at least as early as *Le Sacre*, as a letter to Benois quoted here reveals—that he could never repeat himself. But it is characteristic of Craft that he can see the obverse of such axiomatic propositions. Quotation of a remark by Andrey Rimsky-Korsakov, the composer's son, to the effect that Stravinsky's subject matter had "begun with fairy tales and progressed to primitivism" (1915) prompts Craft to declare:

> This is true, but fairy tales were to remain a part of Stravinsky's imaginative world (*Le Baiser de la Fée*), as was primitivism, though under the larger concept of ritual, both secular (*Les Noces*) and sacred (the Mass). And to these he was to add moral fables (*Histoire du Soldat*, *The Rake's Progress*), myths (*Oedipus Rex*, *Perséphone*), and, finally, biblical drama (*The Flood*, *Abraham and Isaac*).

This is the author at his best, and fortunately on the music he is often at his best. I do not mean the painstaking examination here of musical

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sketches and proofs indulged in with irritating frequency—after asserting in his introduction that the book is intended for the general reader and not the specialist, he gives us passages in which he combs scores rehearsal number by rehearsal number, as if the reader had ready access to a musical library for reference. I do mean those numerous instances in which Craft sees the larger implications of a musical procedure, or gleans a unique insight into the nature of the music:

> What Stravinsky actually heard in the funicular was doubtless very different from the constructions it inspired in *Les Noces*, but the incident is typical: Stravinsky was in the habit of noting down the *music* in the rhythms and intervals of machinery, in street noises, in hurdy-gurdies and carousels—as well as in troubadors, intoxicated or otherwise, such as these Swiss. (p. 151)

And again:

> The character of Stravinsky's music as a whole is radically different in the early California period from that of the last years in Europe. Compared to the Concerto in E-flat (1937–8) and the first two movements of the Symphony in C, which are marked by the domination of classical models as well as by the insistence on diatonicism and the basic tonality, the new "American" music is "freer" and more "experimental." The first two movements of the Symphony in C are among the peaks of refinement in Stravinsky's art, but they are also a cul-de-sac. Contrast them with the two "American" movements of the same work, and with the first and last movements of the 1945 Symphony, in which, whatever else, the sheer physical energy of the music seems so much more abundant, and the ideas—such as the fugue for trombone, piano, and harp—so much bolder. (p. 357)

Then, of course, Craft's insight into the man cannot be gainsaid, and is reinforced here. He explores in some detail the implications of Stravinsky's "double life":

> Vera de Bosset Sudeikina [was] from the time of the *Sleeping Beauty* revival (November 1921) his constant companion, whom he was to marry (1940) after the death of his first wife (1939). From 1921 to 1939, a triangle was the geometry underlying Stravinsky's existence. . . . This resulted in considerable humiliation for both women, since the secret, though open, was unacknowledged. . . . Guilt feelings were one of the many consequences of Stravinsky's personal situation during the 1920s and 1930s, and so was the new religiosity which appeared in his music as well as his life. (pp. 210-211)

A couple of pages are devoted to analyzing the composer's ambivalences as they intensified with increasing age and under the pressure of his peripatetic American years. And Craft notes such fascinating minutiae as Stravinsky's claim to have been descended from Polish nobility.

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With all of the book's virtues the reader must endure a substantial measure of exasperations, some already mentioned. Craft's dogged tracking of the composer's peregrinations after 1920 becomes downright baffling sometimes; there is little or no social context, too, and the lives of Stravinsky and his several circles on two continents (the aforementioned appendix on his politics notwithstanding) are made to seem almost incredibly hermetic. Excessive detail clots the book's flow (we are even told the number of the composer's stateroom on the S.S. "Constitution" when he crossed the Atlantic for the Venice premiere of *Rake's Progress* in 1951), and arch humor, irrelevancies and fatuities litter its course. In spite of these defects, however, it takes its place beside the composer's own *Chronicles of My Life* and *Poetics of Music* (in translation), the Stravinsky-Craft collaborations, White's serviceable volume, and Paul Horgan's *Encounters with Stravinsky*[4] as a staple of the library of lasting work in English on the subject.

[4] Farrar, Straus, & Giroux. Out of print.

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Reviews

CLARA CLAIBORNE PARK

Fiction Chronicle

IN DECEMBER 1959, two weeks before his death, Albert Camus wrote out in his regular and beautiful script a set of answers to an American questioner. Mentioning the unsettling new "anti-novels" of Sarraute and Robbe-Grillet, Professor Robert Specter had asked him, among other things, if he thought the novel was dying. Camus answered with conscious simplicity: "The taste for stories will die only with man himself." That, added Camus, "does not prevent a continuous search for new ways of telling a story." But he made clear where, as writer and editor (he wrote on Gallimard's stationery) the weight of his attention lay. "A story"—the nursery word "histoire" establishes a long context. Stories are what Homer told, and the anonymous narrators of Puss in Boots and Beauty and the Beast. "Oh dear yes, the novel tells a story," was how Forster put it, but whatever the tone, the implication is the same. The taste for stories is what sustains the novel. Not that technique is unimportant: "personally, all techniques interest me." But the sentence progresses: "and none interests me in itself." "The error of modern art lies, almost always, in giving priority to the means over the end, to form over content, to the technique over the subject. If the techniques of art fascinate me, if I try to master them all, it is because I want to be able to use them freely, to reduce them to the role of tools."[1]

The obvious takes on originality when it's been ignored long enough. Nearly a generation later, James Merrill says it his way:

> Fed
> Up so long and variously by
> Our age's fancy narrative concoctions,
> I yearned for the kind of unseasoned telling found
> In legends, fairy tales, a tone licked clean
> Over the centuries by mild old tongues,
> Grandam to cub, serene, anonymous.
> Lacking that voice, the in its fashion brilliant
> Nouveau roman (even the one I wrote)
> Struck me as an orphaned form, whose followers,
> Suckled by Woolf not Mann, had stories told them
> In childhood, if at all, by adults whom
> They could not love or honor.

[1] "Albert Camus: A Final Interview," *Venture*, Vol. 3, No. 4 (1960). A facsimile of Camus's own handwritten replies precedes the English translation of Yvette Gindine, which I have altered somewhat in the direction of a more literal accuracy.

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So, Merrill tells us, he reached for a narrative which would be "limpid, unfragmented," for characters which would be "conventional stock figures/ Afflicted to a minimal degree/ With personality and past experience"—a futile attempt, abandoned for the dazzling shifts of *Ephraim* and *Mirabell.* Yet personality, past experience, and events cohere to make a story and enrich it, and Merrill seems to have restored its nearly lost narrative function to poetry.

Technical experimentation, of course, continues to fascinate writers and critics (Camus uses the untranslatable word "passioner"), for whom, as the modern movement passes its three-score and ten, it remains a criterion of modernity—perhaps the only one. By that criterion the crop of novels under review isn't especially modern. The locus of experiment seems to have shifted to shorter fiction, which frustrates readers less when they can't find their way, since they can turn to the next one and try their luck again. For stories continue to fascinate readers, who hanker unregenerate for pictures of things they can recognize, tunes they can hum, and "a good read."

I hear that phrase everywhere now. We must need it. Yet it's only a few years ago that I came across it for the first time, in a review, I think, of *Watership Down.* It seemed to be English, and thus, flat as it was, came trailing clouds of transatlantic glory. Yet it's a play-safe phrase; it condescends (another sign of English origin). We enjoy a good read—we may even welcome its implied reminder that people read for pleasure. But the words withhold the highest praise; using them, we assert our primitive predilections—for "real characters," for coherency of event, for a world we can lose ourselves in—without taking responsibility for them. Unreasonable to the core, we are impatient of demands which are too hard—page upon page, and how likely is it this time that the puzzles are worth solving? So I decide not to review Durrell's *Livia* when I discover that I will have to filter the story through a narrator who's a novelist (but not a novelist named Durrell) who's conversing with a character from a book he's just written, about other characters about whom the character appears to know more than he; I give up when I find out that the fictional novelist's book bears the title of Durrell's previous book, *Monsieur.* The critic merges not infrequently (though not predictably) with the general reader; what used to feed him feeds him up. A good read promises a certain relaxation into the experience, to which the state of continuous watchfulness is inimical. Whatever else it is, it is not a fancy narrative concoction.

This being so, it is not, perhaps, reassuring that the narrator of *Passenger,*[2] the twelfth novel of the Australian writer Thomas Keneally, is a fetus in the womb. We scent a gimmick, probably an exhausting one. However, we are told at once what it would have been quite a job to discover. It is the experience itself that is to engross our attention, not the way the story's told.

Keneally's story is of a marriage under pressure from an immature man's terror of a pregnancy his wife is ready for but he is not, and of a

[2] PASSENGER, by *Thomas Keneally.* Harcourt Brace Jovanovich. $8.95.

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child who is almost not born. To shift the story's center to the fetus, supreme in the simple egotism of survival, is to affirm life as strongly as it is possible to do, without ever a direct affirmation to afford a purchase for the cynic (or the advocate of zero population growth). For once we have accepted the preposterous premise of a fully conscious fetus—a trick Keneally pulls off without even seeming to try—we can will the story toward only one conclusion.

Keneally's astonishing powers of metaphor erupt at once, establishing the fetus in the imperial centrality of his "capsular magnificence." He is a satrap, a Pharoah, a Caesar; "in the black duchy of the amnion . . . I took bounties from my mother's body—oxygens, minerals, carbohydrates." Yet he is, of course, totally vulnerable, especially in a world in which abortion is such a cool possibility. And even if he escapes external threats, his empire has a time-limit. In the manner of twentieth-century monarchs, he must at length "abdicate and go out into the world as a private citizen."

The words may burst like rockets, the rhythms quicken, relax, spring, do anything Keneally wants them to. But the dazzle is functional. Detailing the pleasures of the unborn, Keneally composes a rhapsody of biology:

> For the born, there were no simple joys. For the unborn, nothing but. Even the couplings and partings of nucleotides and enzymes in the DNA sanctums in my spawning cells clouded my face with pleasure. . . . I was diverted too by the ribosomes. Springing like champignons from the golden floor of my proteins, taking off like hot-air balloons, trailing carnival ribbons of amino acid. If I concentrated I could taste the fragile instant when the chromatidia aligned themselves in the core of a cell like two sides of a house of assembly. Their mad decision to migrate, one party to the farthest south rim of the cell, the other to the farthest north, engrossed me. . . . In their hands, so to speak, the sage chromosomes held the formula for me, which no crisis could alter or distort. . . . I adverted to the charming deftness of my inexorable kidneys and the crafty manufactury of my gut.

On a subject that invites it, Keneally does not even graze sentimentality. Partly it is the tonal mastery—the rise into splendor controlled by the surprises of "sage," "deftness," "gut." Partly it is the recognition of fear—"each man a zoo of vipering doubt"—and the shadow of death, of the waste of innocence born and unborn. In a war memory, Brian, the fetus' father, evokes the dead enemy in an image he cannot forget, and I shall not: "When the firing stilled, the dead terrorists dared lie on the silt displaying ears so pink and translucently perfect that you were reminded of shells on a better beach than this one."

Well, enough of quoting; not many novels tempt so much of it. Amid all this exceedingly fine writing, what of the good read? How consonant with linguistic splendor are its simple virtues?

Keneally keeps things moving, with sudden shifts, hair-breadth es-

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capes, new settings. He has, after all, less than nine months to work with. In which he touches every continent but Africa, ranging from Borneo to Pittsfield, Mass., with a flaming climax over Kalgoorlie, Australia (where, unplanned by the author, Skylab chose to come down two months after publication. Reality's random lightnings rival those of the imagination).

Geographical extension is a common ingredient of the good read, which traditionally borrows the interest of non-fiction. To inform us about the world has been part of the story-teller's function from the time of Homer, expanding horizons as well as sounding depths. So bound into this narrative are the departure of a convict boat to Australia after the Irish Rebellion of 1798, a nun's excellent advice to pretty girls, the discovery of why you don't open the lid of a tank in the Negev three days after it's been disabled. And more. None of it irrelevant, either, all built into the economy of a 241-page novel set with plenty of white space. In fact, one characteristic of the good read's at war with another. The novel's *too* short, too economical, too packed. Expansiveness was part of those good Victorian reads; Keneally's marvelous, but he drives us too hard. We miss a world in which we might get out and walk about. Something's not right. When you're this good, why hurry away? So brilliant a writer, in his twelfth novel, might be expected to show the courage of his talent. A momentary dazzle lights up the depths; then Keneally flashes his beam elsewhere.

Jorge Amado's *Tieta*,[3] on the other hand, is expansive to a fault. A golden-hearted whore returns to her hometown, Santa Maria do Agreste, and her money and influence bring prosperity to an isolated backwater caught between poverty and stagnation and the advent of an industry whose pollution will destroy anything worth having. This issue, dead serious for a Brazil more than usually menaced by the rapacity of development, is converted into entertainment by the admixture of the sexier-than-thou fantasies of that archetypal macho South American, the author. Though her family don't know it, the source of Tieta's wealth is a bordello in Sao Paulo where, to hear Amado tell it, most of the country's business is transacted. Resplendent in her forties, Tieta, once home in Agreste, rescues her seminarian nephew from the horrors of a life of chastity, and saves her sister's marriage with a prescription of some healthy buggery and a little wife-beating. What every woman wants, after all, is "a fling with a strong, sturdy, stiff, healthy, unpolluted, mouthwatering backwoods prick." As Tieta relieves her nephew of the burden of his virginity they "float in the moonlight, in time to the music of the waves. . . . What did age, kinship, a seminarian's cassock matter? A woman and a man were eternal."

Come off it? But Amado's already got that position staked out. The most winning character in the novel isn't the hot madam but the author, a jolly fellow who is nothing if not too clever by half. He does it with winks, he does it with asides, he does it, above all, with chapter headings. "Of a first kiss while looking toward the coast of Africa; a dreadfully ro-

[3] TIETA, by *Jorge Amado.* Translated by *Barbara Shelby Morello.* Knopf. $12.95.

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mantic chapter of the kind no one writes anymore." "In which the author, not satisfied with his usual imbecility, shows off his doltish vanity as well." "A chapter in which we learn of a vigorous mass movement by the workers . . . which provides this novel with an essential ingredient of militancy and social agitation it has heretofore lacked." The book comes WITH AN INTRODUCTION AND BROAD HINTS FROM THE AUTHOR, UNFORGETTABLE DIALOGUE, PERCEPTIVE PSYCHOLOGICAL DETAILS, LANDSCAPES SKILLFULLY PAINTED IN A FEW BRUSHSTROKES . . . DOUBT, MYSTERY, VILE TREACHERY, SUBLIME DEVOTION, HOPE AND LOVE ON EVERY PAGE. It's the Chaucer schtick—God's plenty, and the doltish author all part of the plan. It does go on and on. Amado is no Marquez; unlike Macondo, Agreste is all surface. Yet there's a vigor and ebullience about this society. The author is a man sure of what he's doing and feeling good about it, and for all the high jinks you'll learn something. The next time you read about the Brazilian northeast (or South American machismo) you'll feel you've been there.

From Brazil to Argentina, where Manuel Puig's *Kiss of the Spider Woman*[4] is banned. It's probably banned in Brazil too—for all his joviality, Amado's told enough so that we can guess that. Here, fortunately, we can read it; here, fortunately, we can experience this story of a relationship unfolding in a prison cell under the threat of torture as an expansion of our mental scope, not a reminder of what might, if we weren't careful, be happening to us. Yet it's not a flaming tract but a story about gentleness. Two men share a cell. Molina is a homosexual, in for eight years for "corruption of minors." Valentin is held for revolutionary activities; he has been tortured before and will be tortured again. They have little to talk about, nothing in common. Valentin is young, decent, brave, not especially sensitive. He studies his Marxist texts; he is a man of politics, not of imagination. Molina is a story-teller. He passes the time for both of them describing movies he's seen. And what movies! They're all real films, the one about the woman who turns into a panther, the one about the bride beset by zombies, the marvelous wartime German one about a French singer who abandons the Resistance and dies a heroine when she learns the true nobility of the National Socialist cause. In each there is opulence and elegance and romance, and betrayal, and a beautiful woman who against her true nature is not what she seems, who cannot be trusted by someone she loves and wants to trust her. Molina feels himself in each heroine, tender, unlucky, unutterably sad. He evokes the films so compellingly that they take on the validity of necessity even for Valentin; they are the only art there is, the only escape from the intolerable constriction of pain and fear and the cell.

Puig is a master of narrative craftsmanship, but the novel is no mere concoction. Every subtlety of character and situation—and there are many, as the relationship between the two men develops and changes—is conveyed by dialogue, and conveyed fully. The economy of means mirrors the cell's constriction. There is no exposition at all; the police docu-

[4] KISS OF THE SPIDER WOMAN, by *Manuel Puig*. Translated by *Thomas Colchie*. Knopf. $8.95.

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ments we are given in the middle of the book only confirm what we have inferred already. Yet except for Molina's stories we have heard only the brief, inarticulate exchanges of those who in other circumstances would not have become friends.

The dialogue must work hard. Puig has not only characters to develop, but a story to tell. It is not for nothing that Molina's films are about love and betrayal. The delicate changes that take place in both men as the days pass and they learn from each other lead to a climax; they are ratified by as violent an event as concludes any of Molina's stories. In a paradoxical rebuke to all us snobs of culture, the tawdry, sentimental art is seen to have nourished not only the life of the imagination, but real affection, and, at length, heroic self-sacrifice. The relationship which has made Valentin more of a woman has made Molina more of a man, and we recognize both changes as gain.

Still in Argentina: Luisa Valenzuela's *Strange Things Happen Here.*[5] Two hundred and twenty pages, containing (it says on the cover) "twenty-six short stories and a novel." Some of the stories aren't half a page long; two pages is average. Mostly they're finished before we know what they're up to. There's one about a woman in a bus who picks the pocket of a man who feels her ass. It's well done, but it's over in a paragraph. What did we miss? The point, obviously. There's one about a pampas thistle that "thrives in a city that has eradicted green by decree," "a prickly, ugly little thistle, which even so looks radiantly beautiful to many." A dissident group, initially in pursuit of noble ends, turns it into a false idol and is co-opted by the tyrannical government. There is no hope in greenery or anything else. Maybe it's safer to stick to parable and mysterious vignette if you want to go on living and publishing in Argentina, where Valenzuela is a prominent journalist. Or to write anti-novels. *He Who Searches*, the anti-novella included in *Strange Things*, was not banned in Argentina, though it begins with interrogation and torture and ends with the detonation of a bomb. It seems a world which Puig has prepared us to understand. Not so, though; between beginning and end obtain the weary puzzlements of that orphaned form, the *nouveau roman*. The narrator, a psychiatrist who is variously "I" and "we," is visiting a woman under rather clouded circumstances:

(a) She didn't know that I was giving her therapy.
(b) She didn't know who I was.
(c) She didn't know that I was one and the same person every time I saw her, because I appeared—in the wee hours of Monday and Thursday mornings—in different disguises.

What follows is by no means so clear. To read Valenzuela after Puig is to experience the difference between narrative subtlety in the service of worthy subject and compelling story, and the artfulness that "gives priority to the means over the end." If this is the price of writing in Argentina it is a heavy one.

[5] STRANGE THINGS HAPPEN HERE, by *Luisa Valenzuela*. Translated by *Helen Lane*. Harcourt Brace Jovanovich. $9.95.

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For now, writers in the British tradition aren't troubling themselves or their readers with experimentation. Narration is straight first- or third-person. There are neither authorial asides nor surrealistic discontinuities, and gathering what happens is no problem. For better or worse, neither form nor content of current English-language imports makes demands: they don't take themselves that seriously. In Muriel Spark's *Territorial Rights* [6] the brain is engaged just enough to follow the shifts of a plot in which almost all the characters turn shady, if they're not to begin with; the emotions are engaged not at all. It's laid in Venice; there's local color, and a body buried behind the pensione. One could claim Spark's decaying Venice as a metaphor for European civilization, venal, dangerous, and trivial, but anyone who bought the novel on that basis would want a refund. Swift, astringent, a little too corrupt to be funny, it's a good read for those who like it thin, impeccable, and cold as the floor of a Venetian palazzo. Those that don't can reflect that whatever Auden said, no one is pardoned merely for writing well.

For all its international riffraff, Spark's Venice is an English Venice, though known in odd corners and out of season. There are novels that range, and novels that stay home. In the great century of the English novel, India was full of Englishmen; Englishmen fought in Egypt and administered it; Englishmen discovered the great falls they named for Victoria. But this was territory conquered for the Queen, not the imagination. While French writers fed on North Africa, the English imagination remained insular. Kipling came late, and his truest vision was a child's; it could not sustain a novel about grownups. Conrad was a foreigner. Forster escaped England to write his masterpiece, then returned and wrote no more novels. English fiction at its most characteristic has stayed home.

Thoroughly domestic, entirely unpretentious, very English, *Lady on the Burning Deck*[7] is Catherine Heath's first novel. Heath is warm where Spark is stony; she is kind and funny. But her narrator Frances, like many of us ladies of a certain age and class, is adrift.

> I've got this feeling that real life, by which I mean life as lived in London NW4 in the 1920s, which is of course just too soon for me really to remember it, must sooner or later return or even be rediscovered, going on perfectly normally (I use the word advisedly) in Basingstoke or Lincolnshire or Leeds. . . . A friend of mine [is] back from Lodz (why Lodz, you ask, and indeed I cannot for a moment recall whether it was to revisit the place where she saw her parents shot or to inspect an exhibition of icons or because she had temporarily left her husband to spend a holiday with her Polish lover, all of which activities go on around me now, and in which, or in activities similar to which, I find myself too participating, but which did not go on in London NW4 in the 1920s) . . .

Like many such ladies, it is through her children that Frances experiences

[6] TERRITORIAL RIGHTS, by *Muriel Spark*. Coward, McCann, and Geohegan. $9.95.
[7] LADY ON THE BURNING DECK, by *Catherine Heath*. Taplinger. $8.95.

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the shifting world she lives in. Intelligent and introspective as Mrs. Miniver never was, she's still a true-blue British coper. What's to be coped with is very much of the 70s. One's sons may Come Out (which doesn't mean the same as it used to when one's daughters did), one's daughters may pose for porno centerfolds, but the nuclear family carries on. We Are Not Ashamed—the porno model's parents display her nude photographs, framed, in the sitting room. And We *Are* Amused. Frances assays herself under the stresses of the events of the story, as some areas turn out to be almost infinitely elastic and others tighten with a snap. There'll always be an England, but not in England only do our young test our ability to adapt, or conversely, to hold on to anything we can recognize of ourselves. Catherine Heath is easier on them than Alison Lurie was in *The War Between the Tates,* but not at the price of sentimentality or self-pity. The events she plots are funny enough that reviewer's ethics preclude revealing them, but the comedy is shadowed with a rueful intelligence, a consciousness of loss and gain together, that hovers somewhere between Erma Bombeck and Margaret Drabble.

When in 1964 Edmund Wilson published his "An American's Notes on Canadian Culture" as *O Canada,* he mentioned Robertson Davies, but only as "one of the writers I have not read . . . who I am told are of special interest." Davies had already published eight books at that time, including the novel *A Mixture of Frailties* (1958), which has just been reissued by Everest House.[8] But *O Canada* drew more attention to Wilson than to Canadian literature, and it was not until the seventies, with the publication of the Deptford trilogy, *Fifth Business, The Manticore,* and *World of Wonders,* that Davies began to attract a group of readers who were rediscovering the old-fashioned pleasures of colorful characters, varied settings, unexpected curiosities of knowledge, and a plot full of surprises—in short, a good read. In *The Manticore* Davies explores the Jungian theory of archetypes. A *Mixture of Frailties* belongs to that attractive archetype, the Cinderella tale—the girl whose life is transformed by arbitrary good fortune. Monica Gall lives in Salterton, the imaginary Canadian city which serves as background for two earlier Davies novels. At twenty, she's a clerk in the factory where her dad sweeps the floor; she sings smarmy religious music on the radio with the Heart and Hope Quartet. Her pure, clear voice attracts the attention of the executors of a million-dollar local trust fund, founded ostensibly in order to assist a daughter of Canada to study the arts abroad, actually to spite the founder's family. Monica has passed her life in circumstances not merely "discouraging to art . . . but in which art in any of its forms is not even guessed at." Nobody knows anything about her except that she seems to be a nice girl with a voice not yet ruined by the garbage she's been singing, and she knows nothing whatever about the world or herself. But the terms of the trust admit no delay: she's packed off to England. How she grows there, musically and humanly, is the subject of the novel. Davies is a lively writer who knows so much about vocal literature and performance that Monica's musical education turns out more entertaining than the way she gets to her happy

[8] A MIXTURE OF FRAILTIES, by *Robertson Davies.* Everest House. $12.50.

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ending. "A good book," Davies wrote once (*A Voice from the Attic,* Knopf, 1960), is any book "which feeds the mind something which may enlarge it, or move it to action." By that standard, this is a pretty good book. It certainly deserves a better production than Everest House has given it. I stopped counting typos at 50; they included not only ordinary transpositions but words omitted and even added. In this era of editorial busyness, what ever happened to the humble old practice of double-reading?

V. S. Naipaul's *A Bend in the River*[9] enlarges our minds to another continent, and to pain. Forster wrote in *Howards End* that since the very poor were unthinkable he would not think or write about them; it is all too possible to feel the same way today about refugees. Africa, we are told, is a continent of three million refugees, or four—who can say? Refugees, however, are not Naipaul's direct subject; they come a little later in his history. What he compels us to think about is the breakdown of civilization.

Shall we so dignify it? It was, at any rate, a social order which however open to such adjectives as "racialist" or "colonialist" may be remembered as meeting one minor criterion of a civilized polity: it did not create refugees. Africa has always been dangerous to life and limb. It was a long walk to the slave markets of the east coast from Central Africa, and there were many opportunities to escape, but "to an African, a child of the forest, who had marched hundreds of miles from the interior and was far from his village and tribe, the protection of a foreign family was preferable to being alone among strange and unfriendly Africans." But there is no safety anywhere in the Africa to which Naipaul compels us to think about, to imagine. The novel begins with Salim, a young man from an east coast Muslim Indian community, looking back some 15 years to his trip west to a newly independent state in equatorial Africa—the journey of the slave marches reversed, a hard week's drive in his Peugeot over sand, mountains, lakes, mud, and jungle to the town in the bend of the great river. You can drive that way no longer: "too many of the places on the way have closed down or are full of blood." He has bought a business, cheap, from a departing compatriot. There's not much left of it, or of the European town. Nothing is working; the deserted bungalows are in ruins. But Africa subsists. The river is merely a thread of European goods and expectations whose dark tributaries lead as always into the untouched bush. The market is rich with the yams and the squirming baskets of grubs—"forest foods"—the river women bring. It is only the small middle-class that has been inconvenienced, none of them African (though when people have lived in Africa for three generations what else are they?). Some of them, of course, have been more than inconvenienced—eggs broken for the revolutionary omelette. But others have stayed, or come in, like Salim, to take advantage of new opportunities as things start up again. And indeed the electricity goes on again, the shops reopen. "Business never dies in Africa; it is only interrupted." In fact the town booms, with a Bigburger franchise, a hydroelectric plant, a university to swoop young men from forest to managerial class. It all goes hand in

[9] A BEND IN THE RIVER, by *V. S. Naipaul.* Knopf. $8.95.

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hand with a political absolutism which for a time seems both exciting and benign; American foundationeers and aidmen latch on to it with an enthusiasm which might be touching if it were not so culpable. They can leave, and they do leave, in good time. Salim himself barely makes it out at the last minute, to start over in the Gloucester Road. His half-caste slave, dependent all his life, must remain behind, and the Africans, of course, have nowhere to go. Salim is rescued from jail, and worse, by the young black administrator he befriended as a boy, to hear him say:

> "You mustn't think it's bad just for you. It's bad for everybody. That's the terrible thing. . . . Nobody's going anywhere. We're all going to hell, and every man knows this in his bones. We're being killed. Nothing has any meaning. That is why everyone is so frantic. Everyone wants to make his money and run away. But where? That is what is driving people mad. . . . I've been on tour in the villages. It's a nightmare. All these airfields the man has built, the foreign companies have built—nowhere is safe now."

If I were an African, not a displaced Indian, not (as I am) what in former colonial countries is called a "European," I would probably review this book differently. Is it really like that? In part, surely, perhaps in large part. At any rate, we cannot ignore this testimony.

Though he himself escapes the worst in jail, Salim hears all night the sounds made by villagers "trussed up and dumped in the courtyard . . . maltreated in ways I don't want to describe." I did not seek this theme, but three of these novels concern torture; it is one of the things which defines our world. But not our world only. Shusaku Endo's *Silence*[10] is set in Japan, in 1638, and the moans of innocent villagers under torture are its central reality. Endo's hero (no need to shy away from the word here, or in Puig's novel) is a young Jesuit, Sebastian Rodrigues. The century of evangelization which began with St. Francis Xavier is finished; the humble Japanese converts can only hide from the engulfing persecution. Rodrigues has come from Portugal to be Christ's soldier and his witness. Like Naipaul's Salim it is some time before he recognises the moans for what they are. He himself is not put to torture, but the agony of the peasants finally explains for him the mystery of how his saintly teacher, Father Ferreira, though no one laid a hand on him, could have been brought to trample on the image of the tortured Christ. Endo's story of how Rodrigues too apostasizes, while keeping his own kind of faith with a God known only by his silence, conveys the peculiar isolation of the Japanese Christian, and the strength of a faith that survived for three centuries underground, so that there were 40,000 Catholics to be atomized at Nagasaki.

For a *good read* on this period, you'd better dig up James Clavell's *Shogun*, the 1975 1200-page best-seller, which though dreadfully written is more skillfully told, gives much more history, and goes into the tortures in

[10] SILENCE, by *Shusaku Endo.* Translated by *William Johnston.* Taplinger. $9.95. (First published in English by Sophia University & Charles E. Tuttle, Tokyo, 1969.)

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even more graphic detail. *Silence* seems to me incompletely imagined and uncertainly narrated, though perhaps I am missing subtleties which would be apparent to the Japanese reader. If Graham Greene calls it "one of the finest novels of our time" I suspect that what recommends it to him is not its fictive expertness but the quality of its conviction that steadfastness in the extremes of pain and evil had meaning once and does so still, even when God is silent. This quality, which is called sincerity, has become hard for us to accept in our own serious fiction. Yet it is precious, and we are lucky if we can make use of it when it comes to us from a culture alien enough to ours so that we do not require of it the compulsive irony and sophistication that are one mark of what Harold Bloom calls our belatedness. Solzhenitzin can say things straight out, and so can Endo. I suspect he says them far better than appears in this translation, by William Johnston of Tokyo's Jesuit university, whose cliché-clogged prose surely cannot be doing justice to a novelist identified as "the leading writer in Japan." It is a pity that Taplinger, while retaining his translation, discarded the excellent and necessary historical introduction which Father Johnston wrote for the English-language paperback available in Japan.

Perhaps it is unfair to review Thomas Bernhard's *Correction*[11] in a context of the spirit's martyrdom and the body's torment. The torment of this novel—perhaps we should say *angst,* in tribute to its original language—is of the familiar kind we generate ourselves. A man retires to an attic in a dark Austrian valley to "sort and sift" the papers left by a friend, a brilliant scientist who has come back from England to hang himself after the completion of the huge, cone-shaped house he erected in secret in the exact center of a forest. (The jacket tells us to think of Wittgenstein.) Neither the living man nor the dead one can write a word without qualifying or altering or correcting it. The effect, actually, is not unlike the opening reverie of Catherine Heath's Frances, quoted above, but a great deal more is made of it. Through the double narrative it gradually emerges for whom the great man built the cone, why (subject to correction) he did it, what he expected to come of it, how that expectation was corrected by events, and how he made his own correction. Bernhard gives us as good a rendition as we need of an obsessive-compulsive neurosis *à deux,* entangling us in interminable sentences which recall Beckett's rhythms, but not his humor or surprise. Boredom strikes again; will we press on to discover the way it really was, or (correction) to discover that no discovery is final? William Kennedy called Bernhard's earlier novel, *The Lime Works,* "1973's Christmas present to literary exegetes." This one seems pretty up front if you keep at it—though of course I could be wrong.

The taste for stories will never die, and the United States, too, produces novels. What identifies Elizabeth Hardwick's *Sleepless Nights*[12] as a novel, however, is the jacket. Its impulse is not to tell a story, but to remember.

[11] CORRECTION, by *Thomas Bernhard.* Translated by *Sophie Wilkins.* Knopf. $10.00.
[12] SLEEPLESS NIGHTS, by *Elizabeth Hardwick.* Random House. $8.95.

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> I was planning to think of my mother. *To think,* that is to wonder what I would be forgiven for remembering or imagining. What do those of my flesh and blood deem suitable, not a betrayal? Why didn't you change your name? Then you could make up anything you like, without it seeming to be true when all of it is not. I do not know the answer.

Nor do I, *if* a woman's life has been a web of obligations, if much of its meaning lies in the welfare of all those people we are in the business of nurturing, not hurting, who grow or agonize or die or flourish at home with us, that is (surely that is in the compact) in private. No wonder so many Victorian novels stopped with marriage; the secrets of courtship, overlaid so soon by others so much darker, need no such protection. Yet what (Mary Ellman's question) can you cook with except what you've got in the cupboard? Change the name; the imaginary facts still invite scrutiny. Proust told Gide you could say anything if you didn't say "I." But Proust was a man. And Gide said "I" and broke Madeleine's heart.

One may say women writers today are liberated from this kind of reticence. Hardwick's narrator remains Elizabeth, and the fragments of remembered life seem to match Hardwick's own, though it's not the reader who can spot the fiction if all of it's not true. Nevertheless, the selectivity of these memoirs seems to me specifically feminine. The center that would have shaped memoir into story—whether autobiography or novel—has been deliberately suppressed. Elizabeth is here not as actor or sufferer, but as reticent intelligence. Missing along with her, or barely suggested, are education, work, lovers, husband, child. Mother is here, and somewhat of father. But the life is in the peripheral figures, the raddled girl turned prostitute, Billie Holiday in her "opulent devastation," the cleaning women Ida and Josette, all seen with a sad mercy. In his Music of Time series Anthony Powell does something of the kind, exploiting the narrator's peripheral vision, making a game of the important things he never tells us. But in *Sleepless Nights* it's not a game.

Although a couple of stories get told in Hardwick's fragmented pursuit of memory, story-telling's clearly not the point. It may even be the antipoint. But books are read in order, and juxtapositions made at random create their own expectations. James McConkey's *The Tree House Confessions*[13] had the feel and flow of a memoir ("I was born on an island"), and it took me some time to realize that I was caught up in the economy of a story. Memory for McConkey, if not for Hardwick, "discovers effortlessly the relationships that cohere." Peter Warden at 50, after his mother's death, retreats into the tree house he built for his dead son to explore his memories; he discovers in them a meaning which gives both a terminus to his withdrawal and a shape to the artifact which is the novel.

On their island, deep in nature, Warden's mother could control the sound of the cicadas, pressing on the bark of the tree where they were singing with a touch that seemed to make her one with tree, insects, and stars. Available to every need of son and husband, she possesses a detachment at once gentle and terrible, renouncing on her deathbed those she

[13] THE TREE HOUSE CONFESSIONS, by *James McConkey.* Norton. $8.95.

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cared for: "my father and I—we were but among the myriad of singing insects that she, with a twitch of her hand, had stilled." Alone in the tree house, evoking for himself mother, father, first love, and at last the death of his son, Warden is able to come to terms with his own culpability, and with his mother's legacy, the double pull toward transcendence and toward affection.

Unfortunately, Norton's production of *The Tree House Confessions* is runner-up in the typo sweepstakes.

And *Good as Gold*,[14] the only best-seller in the lot? Since it's been universally reviewed, it's hardly useful to do more than confirm that it really is an awful book. The jacket-copy claims—"major American classic," "his supreme work"—merge into the self-destructive parody in the novel itself, which has much to say about how bad books are written and promoted. Heller savages everybody in reach—the publishing establishment, Brooklyn Jews, Washington Jews, some oddments identified as Wasps. In its many pages there are some funny stretches, most of which the reviews have quoted. But satire requires some locus of value. Heller's not dumb. I expect he knows that, and that the knowledge feeds the despair behind the nihilism of this big, ugly book.

When Elizabeth Hardwick was asked to nominate some post-World War II books to join the hundred or so most important of all time, she suggested Hannah Arendt's *Origins of Totalitarianism* and Simone Weil's *The Iliad: The Poem of Force.* No novels. The taste for stories will never die, but if a long generation is not enough to afford us a good read which is also a great read, we can't ask too much of shorter time periods. (I would have nominated *A Hundred Years of Solitude,* but nobody asked me.) Of the hundreds of books of fiction published between April and June of 1979, fifty-two found their way to *The Hudson Review* office. Half of these I looked over; most I read; thirteen washed ashore in this review. Some are technically accomplished; most are well-written; one sets language alight. Some are good reads. Most enlarge us in one way or another. I suppose I chose them for that; Davies says "a book is good in relation to its reader." Some enlarge our knowledge, some our imagination's scope. A few may also make their contribution to that education of the heart that E. M. Forster called for. Meanwhile, the next tide of fiction is already in flood.

[14] GOOD AS GOLD, by *Joseph Heller.* Simon and Schuster. $12.95.

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WILLIAM H. PRITCHARD

Conradically Speaking

"WHO, FOR INSTANCE, has a first-hand opinion of Shakespeare? Yet I have no doubt that much could be learned by a serious study of that semimythical figure." T. S. Eliot's challenge might with equal justice be raised about Joseph Conrad, whom Eliot a year later in 1919 coupled with Joyce as modern writers whose language was "struggling to digest and express new objects, new groups of objects, new feelings, new aspects." Sixty years after this modernist salute to him, Conrad has become perhaps more venerated than enjoyed. When was the last time, reader, that you picked up *Nostromo*, and did you read it through? What do you remember of the second half of *Lord Jim*? Would you read *Typhoon* aloud to your teenage son (or daughter?) with confidence that you'd both enjoy it? (My son and I recently found ourselves struggling with its nautical vocabulary.) Among the literate minority of current undergraduates, Conrad is of less repute than Joyce, Lawrence, Woolf, Hemingway, and Faulkner; and I suspect that in the modern British literature course taught at my college it is the first three names—rather than Hardy or Conrad—who most engage its large numbers of students. Compared to George Eliot and Henry James—those other members of Leavis' Great Tradition—he can't quite sustain that comparison either, as far as his hold on contemporary sensibilities goes. In the spirit of another remark of Eliot's about Ben Jonson, Conrad may be well on his way to becoming an unread classic, frozen in a "conspiracy of approval."

Whether Frederick Karl's 1000-page biography will arrest or hasten the turning of Conrad into a refrigerated classic nobody is ever actually caught reading, is conjectural;[1] for this reviewer, who has read the 1000 pages while rereading enough Conrad to have a fresh sense of him, the question has been resolved, at least for the moment. Conradically speaking (the word is Nabokov's in a letter to Edmund Wilson) I am alive and well; but I learned that there are few modern writers about whose work it is more difficult to form decisive judgments and evaluations. My thoughts went back to graduate school, when I read *The Great Tradition* and strove to take over Leavis' judgment of Conrad; thus I deplored the "adjectival insistence" in *Heart of Darkness* even as I saluted its originality; or I admitted that for all the fascinations of *Lord Jim* it was overlong and "romantic," especially by comparison with the ironic poise of *The Secret Agent* or *Under Western Eyes*. And I labored to believe that *Nostromo* was Conrad's masterpiece, a consummately dramatic presentation of the splendors and miseries of human idealism and human betrayal. Since my own boyhood reading avoided like the plague anything that smacked of "adventure,"

[1] JOSEPH CONRAD: THE THREE LIVES, by *Frederick Karl*. Farrar, Straus & Giroux. $25.00.

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whether in the jungle or at sea (I was more interested in observing Philo Vance in New York City, or John R. Tunis' Iron Duke as a Harvard freshman), I welcomed Leavis' insistence that Conrad was *more* than a writer of adventure stories, more than a teller of compelling yarns about the sea or the Malay archipelago. I looked for sophistication and complication of manner: the atavistic and elemental needed not apply.

So when I read him with students twenty years ago, it was *The Secret Agent* and *Nostromo* I gave them, and I presented their author as a very knowing fellow indeed, disillusioned and consistently ironic about life: a step down from brilliant Henry James, and to be succeeded most naturally by clever Graham Greene (who has himself now been succeeded by Paul Theroux). My emphasis was on Conrad as an artist who knew exactly what he was doing at every moment, whose view of life was in no doubt of itself and who asked only that his reader be agile and alert, responsive to the narrative tricks he had become so adept at practicing. It's no wonder that, as I remember, the students weren't as enthusiastic about the books as I thought they should have been; nor that before long I found myself wondering about the sustaining power of these clockwork productions I had tried to take apart.

Mr. Karl's Conrad is a deeper and more considerable figure than the one that, with Leavis' help, I once intuited: "our representative modern man and artist. An exile, a drifter, a marginal man until well into his thirties. . . ." Karl believes that

> In probing exile, dislocation of time and place, language disorientation, and shifting loyalties, he extended our view of the shadows of existence. Indeed he suggested that the shadows were to be the main area of existence in the twentieth century. No less than Freud, his exact contemporary, he explored new territory: irrationality, abnormality, nightmare; and he returned from this primitive, discontinuous world not with solutions but with ways of better understanding that savage Congo and primigenial heart of darkness that dwells under the most bland exteriors.

Dedicated to the memory of Lionel Trilling, Karl's foreword sounds very much in the spirit of Trilling's version of modern literature in which the "representative" writers were mainly novelists, mainly Continental (Dostoyevsky, Kafka, Mann, Gide) and mainly important, it seemed, for the new territory they explored. My only quarrel with Karl's claims, perhaps natural to a foreword, is that a reader may find it difficult to know just where he (having finished *Lord Jim* or "The Secret Sharer") fits into the picture. Can *he* feel that, having taken a journey with Conrad, he now better understands the heart of darkness, or whatever it is that dwells under the most bland exteriors? It may be that this upbeat emphasis, even though it is qualified ("not with solutions but with ways of better understanding") claims all too much for Conrad as a teacher—as a novelist who somehow equips us more adequately to deal with life, rather than thrills us with an adventurous rhetoric about the ineffable.

At any rate, response to this biography (published in February of last year) has been mixed, to put it mildly. James Atlas previewed it glow-

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ingly in *Harper's*; a month later Richard Locke said it was hopeless in the *Atlantic*. Anthony Burgess admired it in *The Observer*, bestowing upon it the reviewer's inevitable accolade of "magisterial"; while in *The New Yorker*, George Steiner got things under way in the following manner: "It is difficult to believe that anyone could produce an almost unreadable biography of as vivid a figure as Joseph Conrad." He then went on to accuse Karl of producing a "tedious leviathan," composed in the "texture of aging jello" and deserving of the horrible word "academic." Although it is difficult to believe that Steiner could find anything unreadable, since he has managed to drag his eyes over most of the world's books, why does he assume that writing about a "vivid" fellow like Conrad should ensure at least a readable biography? Conrad has always seemed to me the most unlikely writer in English, possibly excepting Edmund Spenser, one would be tempted, Holden Caulfield-like, to call up on the phone for a chat. Not notable for his humor, always at stiff attention, Polish, somewhat too short and proud for the onlooker's comfort, his vividness is neither an agreed upon fact nor an obviously compelling one. And exploring the Congo by steamboat and on foot doesn't necessarily make up a vivid experience, as we can see from Karl's careful account of the venture. The vividness is in *Heart of Darkness*.

If one were writing about James or Yeats or Frost or H. G. Wells, one would be guaranteed a fund of anecdotes, stories, humorous remarks, wonderful letters to quote—all of which there is precious little to be found in Conrad. My own prejudice is that he presents an absolutely daunting case for any biographer, and that Karl has managed to write a book in which he neither adulates nor shows up his subject—an achievement in itself if we think of Bedford's Huxley or Thompson's Frost. As for the badness of the writing about which Steiner complains with such elegant superciliousness, it is true there are certain awkward or excessive moments, the most egregious of which occurs when Karl writes about Conrad's youthful attempt at suicide in Marseilles in the 1870s: "With an extraordinary sense of symbolism, he shot himself in the chest, trying to reach his heart, and missed everything." I don't so much mind that this is an overcalculating way to talk about attempted suicide, as that I can't help visualizing Conrad picking up and aiming that extraordinary symbolism at his chest. There is also much invoking of Jung and Erik Erikson, neither of whom helps me to understand much about anything, including Conrad. And there are some unfortunate locutions: Conrad is referred to more than once as a "teenager," which I'm sure he never was; nor did he ever have "priorities," nor sport a "lifestyle." But in the main Karl's writing is clear and forceful.

A more serious criticism should be made about the "three lives" division—Conrad as Pole, as seaman, as writer—which serves the biographer well but also raises questions of appropriateness. Karl says, interestingly to my eyes, that in this sequence of lives

> none of its lines appear to flow into each other. There is no way of predicting why Conrad would do a particular thing at a particular time, and even hindsight cannot discover coherence and continuity where

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there is little. His life becomes like a plotted novel, full of seeming inexplicables that follow each other and make only "ultimate" sense because in the end they satisfy us.

But if the biographer is properly sceptical of that hindsight which discovers continuity and so makes everything come out "inevitably," he is also frequently tempted to close-read the plotted novel and make connections among its themes and imagery. Speaking about the birth of Conrad's mother, Ewa Bobrowska, in 1833, Karl can't resist a parenthetical confidence that she was thirteen years younger than her husband, Apollo Korzeniowski, just "as Jessie George was to be fifteen years Conrad's junior." Suppose Jessie had been ten or twenty years Conrad's junior—would it still be "as"? And in his eagerness to demonstrate how Conrad's early Polish life would shape his later life and novels, Karl sometimes labors embarrassingly to wring out significance, as when in the early "Birth" chapter he jumps ahead fifty years to quote a letter in which the older Conrad tells how his son Borys is being very devoted, "coming in several times a day to see whether he can do something for me—for I am very crippled and once anchored before the table can not budge very well." Here, announces the biographer proudly, we have the Three Lives: "the duplication of the Polish experience, his own career as a writer—now fifty, one year older than Apollo at his death—and the sea career implicit in his use of the phrase 'anchored before the table.' " But should not an aging gouty writer be allowed to characterize himself (playfully?) as anchored before a table, without it being made into a symbolic enactment of his whole life (Karl also employs the unlovable word "holistic")?

Karl is also committed to making a great deal of Conrad's "reduplication of his father's life only on a different scale and with different means." Presumably Conrad substituted the sea for Apollo's political adventurism, was, like his father, a literary man (though surely on a "different scale"!), married a woman the same age as his mother was when she married, had two sons whereas his father had only Joseph. Karl concludes the first "life" by claiming that "The parallels are too obvious to ignore, the implications too clear"; yet the implications don't seem clear to me, nor are the parallels obviously unignorable. If, as he says earlier, hindsight can't and shouldn't discover coherence and continuity where there is little, and if Conrad's life, like most lives, is filled with inexplicables—why not respect them, or at least accept them? Isn't one way of "understanding"—in the sense of sympathetically respecting and accepting—a great writer's life to refuse to be satisfied with "parallels" and "implications"? Eliot's insistence, in his spin-off from Bishop Butler, that poetry is what it is and not another thing might be applied to something at least as mysterious as poetry—that is, life itself. When Karl tries to illuminate Conrad's schooling by recalling the famous episode of Sissy Jupe being asked to define the horse in Dickens' *Hard Times*, we may feel that "another thing" has been brought in too willfully and unhelpfully: "Like Sissy Jupe, he identified with another area of consciousness, and like her, he found the school an indifferent matrix for his hopes, dreams, and ultimate

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goals." No, not very much like a character in a satiric episode from Dickens. We will not understand Conrad the better by reducing him to a character in a novel or a reduplicator of his father.

If this sounds like counseling the biographer to adopt a course of close-mouthed unspeculative timidity, let me adduce some passages in the book which do not depend on gratuitous or labored parallels and where it seems to me Karl is sensibly helpful in displaying his subject's life and art. The first discusses Conrad's decision to go to sea:

> It was a consequence of several factors: Conrad's ill health, for which mountain or sea air was recommended, along with physical activity, as a means of alleviating or eliminating the severe migraines. The lack of alternatives: Conrad's poor performance in school . . . made other "land" professions unlikely. . . . Personal reasons: the sea appealed to his own sense of adventurousness and was continuous with the reading he had done. We do not know if the desire for a sea career preceded the main reading of sea literature, or the other way around; but each reinforced the other, which is not unusual when a talented but directionless person is seeking his vocation.

This explanation seems to me reasonable and scrupulous. Another passage deals with *The Shadow-Line*, which Karl sees as "a combination of 'The Ancient Mariner,' with the crew cursed by illness, and the Flying Dutchman, a ship and captain cursed." How do we understand such a novel as emanating from Conrad's imagination?

> It is psychologically compelling that Conrad saw himself as part of a curse, an infection, a malady, all of which he, as a kind of elected king, would have to set right before he could call himself a master mariner. Apparently, he had, in some corner of his mind, accepted the tainted quality of his existence, however he explained it to himself, and saw himself as achieving certain goals solely by hurdling successive obstacles. It is perhaps not happenstance that he chose a sea career, with its stages of examinations and trials, each of which was a torture to prepare for and sit for; as if by passing through each stage of *that* world he could set right the inner coordinates of *his* world.

This is a proper sort of "as if" fiction by which to salute (not patronize or castigate) the mystery of human character, particularly one as mysterious as Conrad's, one that could produce fantasies on itself like *The Shadow-Line.*

Much of Karl's book is written in similarly thoughtful and appropriate terms. Here is what he does with a moment when Conrad, thirty-two years old and having begun *Almayer's Folly*, pays a visit to his uncle's estate in the Ukraine, the area in which he was born:

> In terms of language . . . he was speaking and listening to Polish, writing in French to his aunt in Brussels, and thinking about *Almayer's Folly*

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> in English. In terms of geography, he was deep into the snow-covered Ukraine, right up against the Russian wolf, corresponding with a Western European, and writing about the steaming jungles and almost impenetrable rivers of East Borneo, with himself on the edge of a Congo appointment. The mixture of tongues, sensations, and topography is important, since Conrad the writer was developing as a blend of many traditions, personally, psychologically, culturally, and aesthetically. His life was, in itself, almost paradigmatic of the synesthesia which was the nub of *symboliste* doctrine.

We have here a successful attempt to imagine, with some stylistic energy, a moment in Conrad's life without resorting to any "He must have felt . . ." and without heaping ingenious comparisons and analogies onto it (the business about *symboliste* doctrine is relevant to the assumptions and atmosphere of Conrad's early fiction, particularly *The Nigger of the "Narcissus"*). Or consider this attempt to distinguish Conrad from his master, Flaubert:

> he never possessed the kind of verbal modulation Flaubert was capable of. Flaubert's sense of language leads to Joyce, not to Conrad, . . . Flaubert sought to eschew the self and to find the correct modal variety that would purge subjective elements; whereas Conrad sought the correct word and phrase so he could all the better reveal the self . . . . each was constructing a language for very different ends, Flaubert for effacement, Conrad for greater expression of the ineffable.

These remarks provide at least a jumping-off place for further critical discussion and discrimination.

Conrad's "third life"—his life as a writer—occupies the better part of Karl's book and is of most interest during the years 1900–1910 when he wrote his finest works, when H. G. Wells, Ford, *The English Review*, and J. B. Pinker, the splendid literary agent, are all in the picture. But instead of drawing further attention to the biography I should like to consult my own rereading of some Conrad in order to consider what sort of appeal, what sort of future this expresser of the "ineffable" has for the non-specialist, intelligent reader of fiction. In his review, Steiner hazards the guess that Conrad's reputation, though historically secure, is "of a formal, academic nature"; that his books are particularly appropriate to "those methods of close reading and 'practical' criticism exercised in the academy"; and that these books "do not enjoy the currency of general reference, of urgency" which attaches, for example, to Lawrence. My own experience suggests the rightness of this judgment, and after rereading "Heart of Darkness," *The Nigger of the "Narcissus," Lord Jim, Nostromo, The Secret Agent, The Shadow-Line*, and *Victory* I came away convinced that, more than most novelists, Conrad needs discussion, commentary, argument—the staples of a good classroom—in order for the books to survive.

An extreme way of putting it would be to say that, in introducing *Under Western Eyes* to a class of freshmen a few years ago, the pleasure and ex-

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citement lay not so much in engaging with and being challenged by the political and moral content of the novel (as one would have been by Dostoyevsky) than in trying to keep up to the formal challenge of—for better and worse—the narrative complications experienced. The students in the class who came to life at that point in the semester realized something about art: that a novel didn't have to be a "nuvvle" (Ford Madox Ford's term for the jolly, careless "good read" he found English fiction deplorably made up of) and couldn't be usefully talked about by exclaiming over how real and vivid were the book's characters, or how suspenseful was its story. "I never quite realized before that reading a novel could be like *that*," I imagined my best students to have said, and perhaps they did. But it should immediately be added that reading Conrad is seldom an unmitigated pleasure; that the weariness I struggled with as I pushed on through *Nostromo* (will I ever push through it again?), or the effort of attention it takes to keep oneself abreast of what the prose is doing in "Heart of Darkness" or in *The Nigger*—is formidable. Would it be fair to say that reading Conrad is never fun (*The Secret Agent* and parts of *Victory* excepted) the way, for all their differences, reading Joyce or Faulkner or Lawrence is?

"He desired a stable world in which you could think and develop the New Form," said Ford about him in his marvelous *Joseph Conrad: A Personal Remembrance* (1924), probably the book to take up again after you've put in your time with Karl's biography. And because of the purity and intensity of this desire, "life" had to be put in its place. (Wouldn't *you* want a little peace and quiet, anchored in front of your desk, if you'd done your stint from Malay to the Congo?) It is a commonplace that the most memorable events in the fiction involve responses to solitude, stillness, the ineffable: Marlow's attempted penetration of the heart of darkness; Decoud's and Nostromo's respective isolations; Winnie Verloc alone after she has dispatched her husband; Razumov "alone" in Russia; the defeat of Axel Heyst's solitude in *Victory* (which in spite of some rhetorical blemishes in its latter stretches still seems to me a wonderful book, much of it told in Conrad's most attractive voice). In rendering those events and responses, Conrad developed a style for expressing the ineffable.[2]

Meanwhile he tried to put life in its place. In 1896, two weeks before he was to marry Jessie, he described her as follows to a relative back home: "She is a small, not at all striking-looking person (to tell the truth alas—rather plain!) who nevertheless is very dear to me." And in a letter I grow more and more fond of, written to Edward Garnett soon after the marriage when the Conrads were spending what might be whimsically referred to as their "honeymoon" in a cottage in Brittany, the writer notes that Jessie is being a good comrade "and no bother at all." Karl notes, with some humor, that "the house was on a rocky and barren island off

[2] Critics of this style should pay more attention to the strikingly original work of James Guetti, who examines how and when in Conrad's rhetoric an expression of failure or near-failure becomes a failure of expression (*The Rhetoric of Joseph Conrad*, Amherst College Press, 1959; *The Limits of Metaphor*, Cornell University Press, 1967). The best overall critical book on Conrad is still Albert Guerard's *Conrad the Novelist* (Harvard University Press, 1958).

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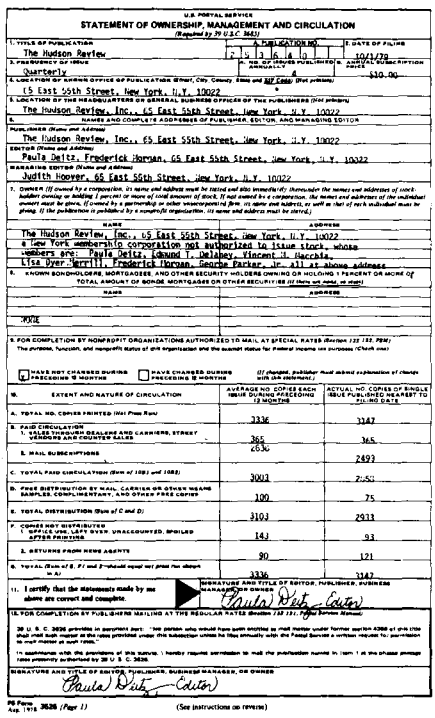
Lannion, an area noted for its fishing widows." Just right for the new bride whose husband was laboring over "The Rescuer," a book which would eventually be published twenty-four years later (as *The Rescue*). Like Stephen Dedalus, Conrad was an impossible person, but unlike Stephen had good work habits, wrote the books he had to write, and left us a style, a way of speaking. That way was described by H. G. Wells as memorably as it has ever been:

> His style is like river-mist; for a space things are seen clearly, and then comes a great grey bank of printed matter, page on page, creeping round the reader, swallowing him up. You stumble, you protest, you blunder on, for the drama you saw so cursorily has hold of you; . . . Then suddenly things loom up again, and in a moment become real, intense, swift.

Wells was making a specific criticism of the early style in the 1890s, but the characterization serves as a more general truth about what it's like to read Conrad, early and later. This new biography makes us need to read him again.



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COMING IN THE HUDSON REVIEW

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DEAN FLOWER

Imperial Fictions

> "What is literary criticism to do with something so wonderful, with writing as an act of keeping alive rather than an image of life or of living?"
>
> —Richard Poirier[1]

CRITICS OF RECENT AMERICAN FICTION keep stumbling over this question. They look for some faithful "image of life or of living," some record of "the way we live now" made authentic by a scrupulously honest, not to say masterful, form. They find instead lavish verbal performances with the author center stage, rambling and reveling in the freedom of his own improvisation. Celebrate the rare instances of the former and bemoan the epidemic of the latter is what we usually hear. Prefer the quiet patience of a Robert Stone or a Grace Paley to the noisy brilliance of a Norman Mailer or a Joseph Heller; prefer the short early novels of Saul Bellow or John Barth to the loose and baggy monsters that came later; prefer the restraint of Frederick Buechner to the cloying excesses of John Updike; prefer the patient integrity of Malamud or Cheever or Woiwode to the extravaganzas of Coover, Gaddis, or Pynchon. Suspect the all-too-clever artificers like Nabokov and Barthelme, and champion the underrated honesty of Maureen Howard or Theodore Weesner. And so on. The choice, and a very good choice it often is, seems to be against the highly performative mode and in favor of a reticent realism. But I want to ask Poirier's question: what are we to do with all the brilliant performative fiction of our time? Does the work of Bellow, Mailer, Pynchon really belong in the second rank, or have we not yet discovered the right criteria?

Consider for example some recent judgments of Saul Bellow. Here's John Gardner, making a fairly obvious complaint:

> Chiefly, [Bellow] allows himself too much talk. . . . At every opportunity, Bellow leans his characters and action on some door frame, turns off his fiction's clock, and, from behind the mask of his hero, expatiates.[2]

Gardner allows that Bellow "may sometimes get away with his intrusions" because (I condense a curiously long list of reasons) of his "view of people . . . as individuals, of suffering as universal and a thing to be dealt with, and of history as a moral search." Moved though Gardner clearly is by Bellow's "unabashed concern" he still feels compelled to dismiss the form: "But the fact remains that Bellow's novels come off in the end as sprawling works of advice, not art." Gardner puts himself in the queer po-

[1] *The Performing Self* (New York, 1970), p. 111.
[2] *On Moral Fiction* (New York, 1978), p. 92.

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sition of praising the author's concerned vision but condemning the form which made it so moving—the personality, the intrusion, the expatiation.

Alfred Kazin comes to a similar conclusion. He says that Bellow's "more lasting fictions" will be *The Victim* and *Seize the Day,* "whose personae are not *exactly* as intelligent as he is."[3] Kazin quotes support for his judgment from V. S. Pritchett who faults Bellow's novels as "too personal . . . fail[ing] to cut the umbilical cord." (That image comes from Turgenev via Henry James.) Kazin's instinct proves better than this, however, when he describes Mr. Sammler's "haughty soliloquies, where the style is of the lightest featheriest, mental penciling, an intellectual shorthand (here involving brusque images of the city) that answers to the traditional contractedness of Jewish thought." Kazin's enthusiasm is suggestive. Might not *Mr. Sammler's Planet* be better—in some way not defined by Turgenev or James—than *The Victim* because of that "excessive" Bellovian presence?

A recent essay by Warner Berthoff takes some interesting steps beyond Gardner and Kazin. In "A Literature Without Qualities: American Writing Since 1945"[4] Berthoff laments the absence in our time of any truly masterful works and finds in abundance "performative novelties," "indulgences in mere self-extending talk," and "unembarrassed volubility." He regrets the current lapse of interest in "good *writing* in the old sense," but does not make the mistake of assuming that the new phenomenon arises from a mistaken idea of aesthetic distance. He conjectures rather that our writers' "deliberate withdrawal or abdication from all extended responsibility" and their "contraction of historical understanding into the new heaven of triumphant selfhood" comes from a self-renewing impulse ("a clean sweep of the performative stockroom") which is ultimately religious. His final compelling example is *Herzog,* where the contraction of self into mere verbose performance climaxes in a wordless peace. Ironic enough to dismiss the mode as *"Scribo ergo sum,"* Berthoff ends paradoxically enough by making us feel that *Herzog* is a masterpiece.

Roger Sale does the same.[5] His deep admiration goes out to the patient, humble, far-from-perfect-but-persistent "realists," and his harshest criticism falls upon the lapses and excesses of the egotistical performers, the aggressive "imperialists" as he unappetizingly calls them. His loyalty remains steadfast to such works as Weesner's *The Car Thief,* James Welch's *Winter in the Blood,* Thomas Savage's *The Power of the Dog,* Grace Paley's *Enormous Changes at the Last Minute,* Robert Stone's *Dog Soldiers,* Larry Woiwode's *Beyond the Bedroom Wall,* Toni Morrison's *Sula,* E. L. Doctorow's *Book of Daniel,* and various "cooler" works of the fifties. Yet Sale again and again goes against his own apparent loyalties to celebrate the "imperialist" writer. Listen first to his definition:

> I call them "imperial" because their demeanor is individual and commanding: "I call the shots here," says the imperial novelist in every sen-

[3] *Bright Book of Life* (New York, 1974), p. 135.

[4] *The Yale Review* (Winter, 1979), pp. 235–254.

[5] ON NOT BEING GOOD ENOUGH: Writings of a Working Critic, by *Roger Sale.* Oxford University Press. $12.95.

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> tence, "and I will not conceal for a minute who I am, though I have no intention of telling you anything more than I choose to." The book can leap time, place, and circumstance at a single bound, as in Pynchon or Kurt Vonnegut, Jr.; it can proclaim personal agony to be a national problem, as in Bellow, Roth, and Mailer; it can transform a few jokes into a vision of the whole world, as in Heller. Underlying it all is a huge assertion of personal power, which leads to aggressive showmanship, plots used as feats of skill, marvelous flights of fancy—in other words, style used as a badge of personal authority, and personal authority having the ability to invent and master whole worlds.
>
> "The Golden Age of the American Novel"

Consider, too, the tone of this:

> These writers share with the [American] empire a ruthlessness in their imaginative assertions, and a tendency to sweep aside or to subsume such external objects as other human beings.
>
> *Ibid.*

And balance it with this:

> Indeed, part of the appeal of the imperial novelists at their best is that their brutality can carry with it raggedness and tornness, and a moving acknowledgment of vulnerability and necessary incompleteness.
>
> *Ibid.*

The best in Roger Sale's criticism seems to me to be here, in just this ability to transcend all prescription and praise what he might condemn.

For Sale is, in a way, prescriptive. He places first in his collection a long essay, "Unknown Novels" (1973), about several unappreciated and unread novelists, all serious patient undramatic craftsmen, whom Sale would rescue from oblivion, as if to prove how askew our judgments have become in celebrating mainly the brash imperialists. "Novelists, Readers, Critics" (1974) carries the argument further. "What about the novelists," he asks, "who do not write in that [imperial] form?" He laments the apparent decline in readers careful and patient enough to appreciate the recent work in this traditional mode:

> intent, careful fictions, realistic one once called them, filled with particulars, of this time, of that place. The very quality of their care procures shape, but such care and such shapes are quiet, loving, respectful of persons, and therefore demanding an answering voice that probably cannot be met these days. . . . One enters into these fictions, works with the author, cares enough to be slow with them.

The inescapable conclusion here is that these fictions (and their readers) are good, morally good, and that the imperial fictions are just the opposite: inattentive, careless, vague, dislocated, shapeless, noisy, brutal, disrespectful of persons, demanding nothing but applause, and hence mor-

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ally bad. I note how often Sale seems indisputably right in this formula (no doubt I have over-simplified it) and yet how often he must overturn it.

On John Hawkes and Kurt Vonnegut, Jr., for example, Sale exposes the cheap show, the unearned assertions, without hesitation. Hawkes has a "contemptible imagination"; people have stopped mattering to him, and when that happens "the writing will suffer and the writer should stop." Vonnegut proves demonstrably "flashy, clever, and empty," the purveyor of a "sentimental cynicism" which degrades and misleads. Any serious reader will relish the harsh justice of Sale's arguments here. On the more complex problem of Philip Roth, Sale praises the "grindingly realistic" early novels and shows how notoriety tempted Roth subsequently toward types of performance, rhetoric, and public statement alien to his real nature. "He is too private a person, too lyrical, perhaps too much, still, a Good Jew, for that." Here as elsewhere Sale skillfully evokes the writer's persona, and uses that rather than any preconceived formula to suggest the moral. His quick recognition of any sort of spurious performance, all the way from the sleazy stylizing of Dashiell Hammett to the academic heaviness of Lionel Trilling, serves him well throughout these essays.

Parenthesis: The collection includes twelve pieces on fiction, seven essays on critics, and three grouped under the heading "Cities." I have chosen here to emphasize his criticism of fiction, but his deep sympathy with the performative genius shows just as effectively when he discusses Leslie Fiedler, Irving Howe, Marvin Mudrick, Hugh Kenner, and Buckminster Fuller. Perhaps the best pieces of all in this latter portion of the book are the ones about the most difficult, original, maverick imperialists of their separate realms, Kenner and Fuller. End parenthesis.

But what of his own performance? Sale aligns himself with the modest, undramatic, scrupulous, unpretentious writers. His voice and manner are meant to convey a blunt honesty, a no-nonsense mind going seriously—and sometimes very doggedly—about its work. Consider the rhetoric of this:

> Strange, is it not? I am no imperialist, I can't come to you with some wonderful, witty, inventive, self-enclosed and self-sustaining theory of the novel and its contemporary audience. Every time I feel my voice trying to rise to something even modestly lavish, I check myself, knowing such lavishness is almost certainly an attempt to cover up some ignorance, some inadequacy.
>
> "Novelists, Readers, Critics"

That seems unpretentious to a fault, wonderfully disarming, and not a little proud underneath. But openness and informality do not mean relaxation for Sale: his favorite terms of praise—*intent, careful, insistent, pressing*—reveal his own manner. He could be describing his own method in writing of Theodore Weesner, "for forty-, fifty-, sixty-page stretches Weesner presses, presses, presses. . . ." While Sale detects in realistic fiction at

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such moments a kind of "imperialist" aggressiveness, his reader feels the same tense energy in him.

For all his persuasive pressure, however, Sale has difficulty in finding sufficient arguments for his preferred realism. His celebration of unknown novelists shows the strain of too many heavy qualifications. Too often he must admit that only more context or more quotation will prove his case. Like most of us, he is better at showing what's not good, or not good enough, than what is. The praise begins so quickly to sound false. Repetition of arguments for certain novels, notably *The Car Thief* and *Dog Soldiers,* tends to undercut them (a nearly inescapable problem, I suspect, for such collections of review-essays). How to make dramatic enough the undramatic methods of these quiet, careful, essentially traditional craftsmen? And how finally to persuade *anyone* that the performative wonders of our recent fiction—the fabulous inventive energy, the verbal richness, the endlessly innovating power, yea, even the imperial yawp—constitute a lesser achievement than the realists'?

Sale can't do it. Nor, despite his apparent intentions, does he want to. Reviewing even so patchy a performance as Mailer's *Of a Fire on the Moon,* Sale finds brilliant moments to respond to: "Mailer like this, free, wanton, thoughtful, makes all the rest worth it." Whenever he mentions *Gravity's Rainbow* ("so assured, so replete, so eager and able to follow its own path as far as it can go, so strong and piquant at once, that one might claim that such writing is, if not justification for the American empire, at least the beginning of an apology for it"), whenever he mentions *Herzog* ("a masterpiece, a book that I will leave the task of inveighing against to others"), Sale's interest and sympathy are infectious. He makes the idea of all these imperial fictions more compelling instead of less. Like Berthoff, Sale discovers the greatness of imperial fictions at moments when "the energy is yielded up, not as a sign of mastery but as a mark of limitation, and then it can return as in realistic fiction, with no need to apologize, to a sense that our home is the world after all." I wish Sale had included more of his early reviews, especially of books like *Catch-22* and *Herzog*; he tells us here that he first described Bellow's novel as "a genuine neanderthal American threat to civilized novel writing." He has come far from that discovery, not in contradiction but in extension of its meaning.

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GARY DAVENPORT

Facts and Fictions of Life

THE TYPICAL HUMANIST INTELLECTUAL OF TODAY is a cultural schizophrenic. The half of his mind that makes him an intellectual is stocked with Tolstoy, Joyce, Henry James; the other half comprises—uncritically, resignedly, or militantly—radio music, television drama, slick photojournalism, and the architecture of the Golden Arches. Maureen Howard, from whom I take all these examples,[1] is acutely aware of such a bifurcation in herself, and seeing her in this context helps me to understand the strangely uneven quality of her fine memoir *Facts of Life.* Part of her mind has obviously been nurtured by advanced learning and rigorous mental discipline, and part of it by that great miasma of sensation, illusion, brazen manipulation, and honest half-truth which, if it ever receives a name, may provide a label for our period of history. Similarly—and I think consequently—she is capable of lucid and profound literary criticism (her introduction to *Seven American Women Writers of the Twentieth Century* is the most intelligent treatment of women's literature that I have seen or expect ever to see), of an interesting and sometimes brilliant novel like *Before My Time,* and, now, of highly effective autobiography; but in the autobiographical mode I find her prone to commonplace insights that ultimately have no place in such an impressive context.

Facts of Life is a mental autobiography, arranged topically rather than chronologically, and although it contains much narrative and portraiture it is concerned to show the development of the author's thought and feeling. The reader will naturally and quite validly consider these thoughts and feelings when he judges the book: an interesting novel about foolish or uninteresting people is possible, but an autobiography, insofar as it depends on ideas or opinions, is no better than those ideas or opinions. I had something like this in mind when I called the book uneven, for I found myself repeatedly engaged by the expert narrative and characterization, but the naked opinions expressed or implied at various points throughout are, to my mind, of a completely different order. Straw men and false messiahs are strange bedfellows indeed for the very real progeny of Maureen Howard's imaginative observation.

The author's pictures of an Irish Catholic upbringing in New England, of her parents and grandparents, and of her days as an unfulfilled "faculty wife" are brilliant and novelistic—indeed if a copy stripped of its dustjacket fell into the hands of a reader otherwise ignorant of its author, he might conceivably fail to recognize it as non-fiction. And the characters come to exist for the reader as if they were fictional. Her father, who is perhaps the most deftly presented and memorable of them all, is an irascible county detective with plenty of shortcomings (including obtuse-

[1] FACTS OF LIFE, by *Maureen Howard.* Little Brown. $8.95.

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ness) but with a paradoxically nimble and articulate mind that allows him to justify himself with maddening success. And the minor characters are virtuoso performances: a Boston elocution teacher whose old-world poise is all but unruffled by her sullen blue-collar husband; an impossibly corpulent, chairbound old woman of disgusting vicarious sexuality; Northrop Frye, bending myopically over a shabby gourmet meal prepared for him by the author (then in the first throes of faculty-wifery) when he visited Kenyon College.

The prose is usually witty and accurate, as in this terse characterization of the college faculty:

> To some of them their profession was still of interest, but many of these men, gray-templed deans and full professors now, were too forceful for the gentlemanly world of the university they had entered. They sounded in their competitive talk like politicians or oil executives and they thrilled to power rather than ideas. Tenure, grants, jousting for position, only one or two spires of the tower were built of ivory.

And the one-liners are equally appealing: "Our piano lessons, taught by Sister Mary Patronella, a large woman who dosed with Listerine so that she might breathe freely over her pupils, cost fifty cents an hour and were not worth the price." Or this, on some acquaintances of the author's youth: "For years I filed them away under 'Miscellaneous—Slightly Embarrassing' along with the Luftwaffe pilot, an unregenerate Nazi I drank with on a transatlantic crossing, and my performance, while a faculty wife, as Antigone."

Probably at about the time he was treated to braised turnips in Gambier, Ohio, Northrop Frye wrote his fine essay called "Towards Defining an Age of Sensibility," in which he made a distinction between writing which attempts to look like a finished product and that which tries to give the impression of a spontaneous and unfolding process. The distinction seems useful here, because Maureen Howard's writing is generally oriented toward the latter ideal: "It's clear that I am upset. No, angry. The truth is that I am afraid . . . . " And the narrative voice, as in some of her fiction, shifts constantly—now reportage, now reverie. Sometimes the mode is annunciatory ("Now, if you will step up, Ladies and Gentlemen . . . "), sometimes imagistic ("This persistent image: I am walking up Murray Hill to Grand Central . . . "), and sometimes even quasi-cinematic ("In the next reel we see a honeymoon cottage"). These personae and other effects are often quite successful, but at times the tonal control becomes so uncertain that it is difficult to be sure who the "I" is (the author at present, or an ironically viewed earlier version?), who the occasional "you" is, whether an event is in the past, the present, or the imagination.

Despite the usual sharp focus of the book, its nature is, as I have suggested, unignorably dual. Some of the intellectual positions stated or implied might have been considered "advanced" a quarter of a century ago: a living hatred of Joe McCarthy, a brand of Freudianism that is nowadays of interest mainly to historians of psychology, enlightened "parent-

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ers," and professors of English. Also, readers of Joyce and his later compatriots may be as little refreshed as I was by another kick at the corpse of Irish Catholicism (and may incidentally join me in the sincere hope that the now standard "unrepressive" upbringing will produce its crop of Joyces—and Maureen Howards). Finally, the author's dislike for forms—for instance the formulaic recitations demanded of the "brainless automatons" in her grade-school class before their first communion—would have been more impressive to me if she had demonstrated some awareness that the antiformalist orthodoxy of today is every bit as formal and ensconced, and is no less brainlessly espoused by just as many automatons.

What Maureen Howard *sees,* clearly and objectively, is always interesting. I remember Goethe's dismissal of Byron's "thinking," and I don't feel that any such remark is appropriate here (not that being a "seer" rather than a "thinker" is any disgrace for an imaginative writer—it certainly wasn't for Homer and Shakespeare); but I do believe that most of the virtues of *Facts of Life* are those rare virtues of observation that make for good fiction.

Notes on Contributors

The long poem in this issue will be included in R. G. VLIET's forthcoming collection, *Water and Stone* (Random House).

LINDA COLLINS* lives in New York City. She is working on a novel.

SALLY WOOD* has published stories, reviews, and translations of French poetry, as well as two detective novels.

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Editor of *North American Review,* ROBLEY WILSON, JR.* is at work on a novel.

Searching the Drowned Man is a book of poems by SYDNEY LEA forthcoming from the University of Illinois Press. He is the Editor of *New England Review* and teaches creative writing at Dartmouth and Yale.

JEROME MAZZARO is currently Hadley Fellow at Bennington College. His *Postmodern American Poetry* is due out in January from the University of Illinois Press.

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Asterisk indicates a new contributor.

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MARVIN MUDRICK

The Brother of Us All

IN JULY 1880, friendless and penniless in a dismal Belgian mining village, Van Gogh learned that his brother had sent some money to be given to him, and he broke a nine-months' silence, the longest of their lives, with a very long letter. He was twenty-seven, a failure at everything, a touchy misfit without vocation or prospects, unnerving to strangers, "impossible and suspect" (as he correctly observed) to his family, a problem for everybody. He accepted the money with thanks ("with reluctance" too, "but I am up against a stone wall"), and then, as comprehensive, intense, and exact as always, he went on to explain why Theo and the rest of the family were probably wrong to believe that getting a job and settling down would solve the problem: "I am a man of passions, capable of and subject to doing more or less foolish things, which I happen to repent, more or less, afterward. Now and then I speak and act too hastily, when it would have been better to wait patiently. . . . Well, this being the case, what's to be done? Must I consider myself a dangerous man, incapable of anything? I don't think so."[1] The lunatic is reasoning with the doctor and ever so gently turning the tables and raising the stakes:

> the problem is to try every means to put those selfsame passions to good use. For instance, to name one of the passions, I have a more or less irresistible passion for books, and I continually want to instruct myself, to study if you like, just as much as I want to eat my bread. . . . When I was in other surroundings, in the surroundings of pictures and works of art, you know how I had a violent passion for them, reaching the highest pitch of enthusiasm. And I am not sorry about it, for even now, *far from that land, I am often homesick for the land of pictures.*

The problem is in the spirit, in the soul, and has to be examined deliberately and at length before it makes sense for either of us to think about what next:

> You remember perhaps that I knew well (and perhaps I know still) who Rembrandt was, or Millet, or Jules Dupré or Delacroix or Millais or M. Maris. Well, now I do not have those surroundings any more—yet that thing called soul, they say it never dies, but lives on and continues to search forever and ever and ever. So instead of giving way to this homesickness, I said to myself: That land, or the fatherland, is everywhere. So instead of giving in to despair, I chose the part of active

[1] THE COMPLETE LETTERS OF VINCENT VAN GOGH. New York Graphic Society. 3 vols. $90.00.

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> melancholy—in so far as I possessed the power of activity—in other words, I preferred the melancholy which hopes and aspires and seeks to that which despairs in stagnation and woe. So I studied somewhat seriously the books within my reach like the Bible, and the *French Revolution* by Michelet, and last winter, Shakespeare and a few by Victor Hugo and Dickens, and Beecher Stowe, and lately Eschylus. . . .

A year earlier, in the village from which he was writing, he had worked as an evangelical missionary but his supervisors had dismissed him because, though they acknowledged his devoted service to the miners, he had soon demonstrated his unfitness for a Christian vocation by giving away his money, clothes, and bed and subsisting on crusts in a hovel (his father, a clergyman, made an emergency visit but couldn't persuade him to behave in a "less exaggerated" way). In the aftermath he had lost his Christian faith but not his eagerness and devotion: "you must not think that I disavow things—rather I am faithful in my unfaithfulness and, though changed, I am the same; my only anxiety is, How can I be of use in the world? Can't I serve some purpose and be of some good? How can I learn more and study certain subjects profoundly? . . . And then one feels a terrible discouragement gnawing at one's very moral energy, and fate seems to put a barrier to the instincts of affection, and a choking flood of disgust envelops one." The problem is how to live, how to be worthy, how to be not only strong and serious but useful, made use of, used up: "Do our inner thoughts ever show outwardly? There may be a great fire in our soul, yet no one ever comes to warm himself at it, and the passers-by see only a wisp of smoke coming through the chimney, and go along their way. Look here, now, what must be done?"

Typically, artists don't do such shameless soul-searching unless they come to believe they've mistaken or exhausted the possibilities of art: Tolstoy in middle age and after, for example; but Van Gogh does it from his earliest youth, from long before he becomes a painter, and if he weren't Van Gogh one would be tempted to feel superior and uncomfortable—isn't he a bit pharisaical or masochistic or already quite beside himself with self-absorption? and even the philosopher who said the unexamined life isn't worth living might have conceded that nobody has to start so early. (Of course many people never examine their lives at all and, if the philosopher is right, are better off dead. Efficient and concentrated artists, for instance, as well as *idiots savants* aren't figments of the popular imagination, they really exist, they aren't exceptionally aware of themselves or others and have been known to pass their time between masterpieces doing whatever to whomever with nary a twinge of introspection or conscience: a mistress of Picasso's, asked what he had been like as a lover, replied, "Like all artists. In and out and back to work." The arts are hard work and don't necessarily leave the artist with soul to spare.) Van Gogh, however, seems a candidate for sainthood from the beginning, strong and serious, a moralist, a prophet, a believer, a porer over sacred books, an oracle and scribe, a big clear brightly lighted upper story; and the impression is ominous no doubt but it's accurate only as far as it goes, because at

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any moment he will notice something else, triumphantly discover another sacred book, bump up against a different truth—he's a seer not a prophet, an enthusiast not a believer, an amateur not an insider, loves artists not art ("I read books to find the artist who wrote them"; at twenty-one he admonishes seventeen-year-old Theo to "*Admire* as much as you can" and names fifty-four living painters "whom I like especially: Scheffer, Delaroche, Hébert, Hamon, Leys. . . . Then there are the old masters, and I am sure I have forgotten some of the best modern ones"), delights in the unending proliferation of sacred books (Balzac, Hugo, Zola, the Goncourts, Maupassant, Shakespeare, Whitman, Dickens, George Eliot, Tolstoy; from Arles, just released after solitary confinement in the mental ward, he writes Theo that "I took advantage of my outing to buy a book, *Ceux de la Glèbe*, by Camille Lemonnier. I have devoured two chapters of it—it has such gravity, such depth! Wait till I send it to you. This is the first time in several months that I have had a book in my hands. That means a lot to me and does a great deal toward curing me"), scatters truths not like the wind that bloweth where it listeth but like a good soul and a warm heart:

> When . . . [Mauve, a celebrated painter of the time and a relative of Van Gogh's by marriage] reads something that is deep, he does not say at once, That man means this or that. For poetry is so deep and intangible that one cannot define everything systematically. But Mauve has a fine sentiment, and, you see, I regard that sentiment as worth so much more than definitions and criticism. And when I read, and really I do not read so much, only a few authors—a few men whom I discovered by accident—I do it because they look at things in a broader, milder, and more loving way than I do, and because they know life better, so that I can learn from them; but I care so very little for all that rubbish about good and evil, morality and immorality. . . .

—and even when, heartbreakingly often, the truths turn painful, they never turn cold or cunning:

> Since I wrote Mauve: "Do you know that those two months you spoke of have long since passed? Let us shake hands, and then each go his own way, rather than have a quarrel between you and me," I repeat, since I wrote this and received no sign in reply, my grief chokes me.
>
> Because—and you know this—I love Mauve, and it is so hard that all the happiness he pictured to me will come to naught. For I am afraid that the better my drawings become, the more difficulty and opposition I shall meet. Because I shall have to suffer much, especially from those peculiarities I *cannot* change. First, my appearance and my way of speaking and my clothes; and then, even later on when I earn more, I shall always move in a different sphere from most painters because my conception of things, the subjects I want to make, inexorably demand it. . . .

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> Look here, in my opinion all politeness is founded on goodwill toward everybody, founded on the necessity everyone who has a heart in his breast feels, to help others, to be of use to somebody, and finally, on the need to live together, and not alone. Therefore I do my best, I draw, not to annoy people, but to amuse them, or to make them see things which are worth observing and which not everybody knows.
>
> I cannot believe, Theo, that I could be such a monster of insolence and impoliteness as to deserve to be cut off from society, or as Tersteeg says, "should not be allowed to stay in The Hague."
>
> Do I lower myself by living with the people I draw? Do I lower myself when I go into the houses of laborers and poor people and when I receive them in my studio?

With his intractable reasonableness he challenges everything, and people respond *ad hominem,* and then he defends himself passionately (*Cet animal est très méchant, / Si on l'attaque, il se défend*: What a naughty beast! as the French say; if it's attacked it defends itself), and finally all they want is to cut him off from society, drive him back into the deep forest. He has the hope of a millennium ("How can I be of use?"): according to Theo, "whatever he sees that is wrong he must criticize"; "A quiet life is impossible for him, except alone with nature or with very simple people." Once he had revealed himself to society for the sort of man he was, they all turned Dutch uncle, as indignant and self-righteous as the mob in Arles that insisted the streets weren't safe unless the cops grabbed the crazy red-haired painter and carted him off. Tersteeg, successful art-dealer, arbiter of taste, manager of Goupil & Co.'s branch in The Hague, had approved of the "diligent, studious" boy (at sixteen Vincent had been hired there because his Uncle Vincent was one of the owners) but disapproved of the man, who was obviously a disgrace pure and simple and his work an insulting joke: he looked at a drawing Van Gogh showed him and said, "You failed before and now you will fail again—it will be the same story all over again" (because, as they all agreed, he couldn't settle down, keep a job, do anything worthwhile). Mauve was at first friendly and instructive to the novice painter but then refused to see him and wouldn't answer his letters, apparently for no other reason than the bad impression he sooner or later made on all respectable people except Theo. (From his early twenties Van Gogh was "impossible and suspect" to his whole family except Theo, to whom one of their sisters complained, "You think he's something more than ordinary but I think it would be much better if he thought he was just ordinary.") He didn't begin painting till late (he had been painting for only ten years when he shot himself at thirty-seven) and seems to have begun almost inadvertently. In July 1880, not yet having become the artist they would all find as eccentric and unacceptable as the man, he must have been as close as he ever was to believing they were right, this lost soul fallen away from religion and family, estranged even from Theo; so when Theo rematerialized to send him that unexpected gift, he took it: the money, the opportunity to describe and circumscribe the nature of the problem, the opportunity to implicate Theo forever. Through the family connection Theo was employed in Goupil & Co.'s

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Paris branch (to which, years before, Van Gogh himself had been transferred and by which he had eventually been dismissed: family did everything, gave life and withdrew it, proposed and disposed), Theo had a salary and access to art, Theo was the last chance, Theo would help, and in his next letter he asked Theo for "prints by, or after, Millet, Breton, Feyen-Perrin, etc. . . . Send me what you can, and do not fear for me. If I can only continue to work, somehow or other it will set me right again. . . . I am busy drawing, and I am in a hurry to go back to it, so good night, and send me the prints as soon as possible, and believe me, Ever yours, Vincent"—it's the very moment when he decides to become a painter and plucks Theo out of the family as his indispensable accomplice.

In the act of living his life he has to keep justifying it to the one person on the other side who listens—not only its shape and momentum but its homeliest details: he writes from Arles that he "lives like a monk who goes to the brothel once a fortnight"; and, after the citizens have petitioned the mayor to lock him up, "All I would ask is that people I don't even know . . . do not meddle with me, when I am busy painting, or eating, or taking a turn at the brothel, since I haven't a wife." He is living out the family tragedy—confronted by the unbudgeable Van Goghs with their wives (as for himself, "my ugly face and shabby coat" frighten and repel the women he falls in love with and asks to marry him), their professions, connections, getting along, getting ahead, as well as by the family of man that can't tolerate this scapegoat, black sheep, stray animal that against blows and curses keeps trying to find its way back in: "My dear brother," he writes in January 1890 after a second breakdown, "Many thanks for your letter of December 22, containing a 50-fr. note. First of all I wish you and Jo[2] a happy New Year and regret that I have perhaps, though quite unwillingly, caused you worry, because M. Peyron must have informed you that my mind has once more become deranged." By this time Theo has steadily supported him, with money and otherwise, for nine years; he has wanted more than anything else to repay the "debt": "I can't help it that my pictures don't sell," he writes despairingly in letter after letter, he hopes and hopes they'll be "salable" (only one of his pictures was sold during his lifetime); "my dear boy, my debt is so great that when I have paid it, which all the same I hope to succeed in doing, the pains of pro-

[2] Theo's fiancée. "The trouble with Gauguin in Arles," writes her son in his "Additional Notes" to her Memoir of Van Gogh in the *Letters*, "started [and Van Gogh's first breakdown occurred] right after Vincent heard from Theo that he intended to marry. Other crises came about after Theo's marriage, after the announcement that a baby was expected, and after the birth. It must have passed through his mind that he would lose his support, though he never mentioned it and it never came about." On the other hand Charles S. Moffett, "an associate curator at New York's Metropolitan Museum of Art," thinks that Van Gogh's troubles testify to his lifelong lack of nerve: "From the beginning, Van Gogh seems to have had a deep-rooted fear of success. Whenever he was close to achieving a goal or succeeding in an enterprise, his behavior became abnormal, and a crisis ensued. He had failed in everything he had ever done, and he evidently intended to see that painting was no exception" ("Van Gogh's Year of Wonder," *Portfolio*, I, April/May 1979, p. 30). Van Gogh ought to have foreseen that he would ultimately become famous enough for bureaucrats to be showering him a century later with psychoanalytic debris.

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ducing pictures will have taken my whole life from me, and it will seem to me that I have not lived"; but his incidental repayment is this full and guileless record of a life.

"The survival of art," according to Harold Rosenberg, "depends on the continued fabrication of the artist type. The urge to transform oneself into an artist is provided by the artist myth, with its lure of fame, women, and wealth. The difficulty is that the artist type can no longer be copied from existing models, since these have been appropriated by the mass media and reproduced in deteriorated form—e.g. the Poes, Van Goghs, and Toulouse-Lautrecs of the movies."[3] But the point for the mass media is that Poe, Van Gogh, and Toulouse-Lautrec are spectacularly *visible,* they are public images congenial to a visual medium—not only the fact that two were painters but Poe's dank tarns and ghoul-haunted baggy eyes, Toulouse-Lautrec's half-size legs, the piece of Van Gogh's ear that he *sliced off and carried as a gift to one of the girls at the brothel for whose* fortnightly favors he punctuated his monkish routine: TV and the movies don't make their choices without a reason. Moreover Van Gogh is the IBM-sponsored Sunday-night Special because his life seems important by itself, it isn't merely that we gawk because he's human and an artist too (he had a father and mother, fell in love, needed money, and in his spare time did all those paintings), it isn't that his art seems inconceivable apart from his life or his life more important than his art, but he is special because—though all those paintings are a generous legacy, a kind of bonus for sweating it out with him—his life as he records it for us reminds us that the life of anybody at all is more important than all the art (and all the curators) in the museums: which is a proposition that a mass-media vice-president might guess is salable even if he wouldn't guess it's true. Anyhow Van Gogh's life, spectacularly deficient in fame, women, and wealth, was never likely to encourage careerists to jump into art; "the urge to transform oneself into an artist" is less likely to be external than internal; it can be argued that the artist type isn't the definitive human type ("the antennae of the race") and that its disappearance wouldn't mean the end of the world; irrespective of the availability of the artist type, art isn't eternally self-renewing, certain genres if not entire arts fulfill themselves and become historical; artists aren't heroes who resist the blandishments of the mass media (haven't there always been distractions and alternatives?), they are workers who feel at home among the practical conditions of their work (artists *like* to do art and can't imagine *not* doing it); and history's surprises may not all turn out to be unpleasant ones. Meanwhile art, like religion, will continue to be overrated by those who believe in it or profit by it or have a professional stake in it; but artists like Van Gogh will go into it and stay with it because in the lives they have to live art keeps them busier and more concerned than anything else they know about:

> These painter's fingers of mine are growing supple, even though the carcass is going to pieces. And the merchant's head for selling—and a

[3] "On Art and On History," *Prose,* Number Three, Fall 1971, p. 133.

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long job to learn it is—is getting more experience too. In our situation, which you may well say is so precarious, we must not forget our advantages, and let's try to hang on to our patience to do the right thing and see clearly. Isn't it true, for instance, that in any case it is better if someday they say to you, "Go to London," than chuck you out, your services no longer being required?

I am getting older than you, and my ambition is to be less of a burden to you. And, if no actual obelisk of too pyramidal a catastrophe occurs and there's no rain of frogs in the meantime, I hope to achieve it sometime.

I have just taken thirty painted studies from the stretchers. If it's only our living we're after in *business* affairs, would it be such a hardship to go to London, where I think there is more chance of selling than elsewhere? In any case, I tell myself that out of the thirty studies I shall send you, you will not be able to sell one in Paris. But then, as old Prinsenhage would say, "Everything gets sold." And in our case, what I do is not salable like the Brocharts for instance, but it can be sold to people who buy things because there is *nature* in them.

Why, a canvas I have covered is worth more than a blank canvas.

That—believe me my pretensions go no further—that is my right to paint, my reason for painting, and by the Lord, I have one!

All it has cost me is a carcass pretty well destroyed and wits pretty well crazed, and only to lead the same life I might and should lead if I were a philanthropist.

All it has cost you is, say, 15,000 francs, which you have advanced to me. . . .

If I reminded you just now of what painting costs us, it is only to emphasize what we ought to tell ourselves—that we have gone too far to turn back, that's all I harp on. For, material existence aside, what else shall I ever need?

(But some days he hasn't the heart for jokes: "A *wife* you cannot give me, a *child* you cannot give me, work you cannot give me. Money, yes. But what good is it to me if I must do without the rest!" And some days, as when they are living together—Theo is still a bachelor—in Paris, Theo can endure the burden only by sharing it with somebody else, in this case their sister: "My home life is almost unbearable. No one wants to come and see me any more because it always ends in quarrels, and besides, he is so untidy that the room looks far from attractive. I wish he would go and live by himself. He sometimes mentions it, but if I were to tell him to go away, it would just give him a reason to stay; and it seems I do him no good. I ask only one thing of him, to do me no harm; yet by his staying he does so, for I can hardly bear it." And some days, soon after Vincent's arrival in Paris, Theo blazes with brotherly pride and love: "He is in much better spirits than before and many people here like him . . . he has friends who send him every week a lot of beautiful flowers which he uses for still life. He paints chiefly flowers, especially to make the colors of his next pictures brighter and clearer. If we can continue to live together like this, I think the most difficult period is past, and he will find his way.")

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He was mad about Japanese prints, which had been making their way into Europe, and he collected as many as he could afford and put them up on his walls: "I envy the Japanese the extreme clearness which everything has in their work. It is never tedious, and never seems to be done too hurriedly. Their work is as simple as breathing, and they do a figure in a few sure strokes with the same ease as if it were as simple as buttoning your coat." Even in sunburnt Arles he kept seeing "Japanese" compositions:

> I saw a magnificent and strange effect this evening. A very big boat loaded with coal on the Rhône, moored on the quay. Seen from above it was all shining and wet with a shower; the water was yellowish-white and clouded pearl gray; the sky, lilac, with an orange streak in the west; the town, violet. On the boat some poor workmen in dirty blue and white came and went carrying the cargo on shore. It was pure Hokusai. It was too late to do it, but one day when that coal boat comes back, I must give it a try. I saw it in a railway coalyard, a spot I have just found, and where there will be plenty of other things to do.

But even more electrifying in Arles were its unrecorded native products—people (women mostly) and color: "There are women like a Fragonard and like a Renoir. And some that can't be labeled with anything that's been done yet in painting. The best thing to do would be to make portraits, all kinds of portraits of women and children. But I don't think that I am the man to do it":

> I shall go on working and here and there among my work there will be things which will last, but who will be in figure painting what Claude Monet is in landscape? However, you must feel, as I do, that such a one will come . . . the painter of the future will be *a colorist such as has never yet existed.* Manet was working toward it, but as you know the impressionists have already got a stronger color than Manet. But this painter who is to come—I can't imagine him living in little cafés, working away with a lot of false teeth, and going to the Zouaves' brothels, as I do.

But he protested too much, he must have had a persistent suspicion that he was just the man to do it. He needed time, though; thus, when the worst happened, he tried to pretend that nothing had happened: "I got back home today. I do so regret that you had all that trouble for such a trifle. Forgive me, who am after all the primary cause of it all. I did not foresee that it would be important enough for you to be told of it." (Here is Theo's wife's account of the "trifle": "On December 24 a telegram arrived from Gauguin that called Theo to Arles. Vincent, in a state of terrible excitement and in a high fever, had cut off a piece of his own ear and taken it as a present to a woman in a brothel. There had been a violent scene; Roulin the postman managed to get him home, but the police intervened, found Vincent bleeding and unconscious in bed, and sent him to the hospital. Theo found him there, 'poor fighter and poor, poor suf-

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ferer,' and stayed over Christmas. Gauguin went back with Theo to Paris.") But two months later, when the police had come at the urging of his neighbors and carried him off, he was ready to state the case and admit the feelings ("I will not deny that I would rather have died than have caused and suffered such trouble"):

> My dear brother,
>
> I seemed to see so much brotherly anxiety in your kind letter that I think it my duty to break my silence. I write to you in the full possession of my faculties and not as a madman, but as the brother you know. This is the truth. A certain number of people here (there were more than 80 signatures) addressed a petition to the Mayor (I think his name is M. Tardieu), describing me as a man not fit to be at liberty, or something like that.
>
> The commissioner of police or the chief commissioner then gave the order to shut me up again.
>
> Anyhow, here I am, shut up in a cell all the livelong day, under lock and key and with keepers, without my guilt being proved or even open to proof.
>
> Needless to say, in the secret tribunal of my soul I have much to reply to all that. Needless to say, I cannot be angry, and it seems to me a case of qui s'excuse s'accuse.
>
> Only to let you know that as for setting me free—mind, I do not ask it, being persuaded that the whole accusation will be reduced to nothing—but I do say that as for getting me freed, you would find it difficult. If I did not restrain my indignation, I should at once be thought a dangerous lunatic. Let us hope and have patience. Besides, strong emotion can only aggravate my case. That is why I beg you for the present to let things be without meddling.

"Good-by, my dear boy," he concluded, "for a little while, I hope, and don't worry."

He lived a year and a half after the first breakdown, in and out of asylums, painting whenever he was allowed to, pouring out—this volcano of lucidity—letters to Theo as reflectively and lavishly as ever, passing through Paris to be seen for the first time by Theo's wife:

> I had expected a sick man, but here was a sturdy, broad-shouldered man, with a healthy color, a smile on his face, and a very resolute appearance; of all the self-portraits, the one before the easel is most like him at that period. . . .
>
> "He seems perfectly well; he looks much stronger than Theo," was my first thought.
>
> Then Theo drew him into the room where our little boy's cradle was; he had been named after Vincent. Silently the two brothers looked at the quietly sleeping baby—both had tears in their eyes. Then Vincent turned smilingly to me and said, pointing to the simple crocheted cover on the cradle, "Do not cover him too much with lace, little sister."
>
> He stayed with us three days, and was cheerful and lively all the

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> time. St. Rémy [the asylum from which he had just come] was not mentioned. He went out by himself to buy olives, which he used to eat every day and which he insisted on our eating too. The first morning he was up very early and was standing in his shirt sleeves looking at his pictures, of which our apartment was full. . . .

From this visit he went immediately to board with Dr. Gachet in Auvers, returning for a last visit to Paris three weeks before his death: "Many friends came . . . among others Aurier, who had recently written his famous article about Vincent and now came again to look at the pictures with the painter himself. Toulouse-Lautrec stayed for lunch and made many jokes with Vincent about an undertaker's man they had met on the stairs. . . ."

During his last months and posthumously, Van Gogh had all the family he needed. When Theo came to the hospital in Arles, he laid his head on the pillow beside Vincent's, and Vincent whispered, "Just like Zundert" (the village where they had spent their childhood). When Vincent died Theo wrote their mother: "One cannot write how grieved one is nor find any comfort. It is a grief that will last and which I certainly shall never forget as long as I live. . . . Oh Mother! he was so much my own, own brother." Theo himself died six months later, and his widow and their baby son returned to Holland with trunkfuls of Vincent's unsalable paintings and his unsorted, mostly undated letters. Without money or influence[4] she succeeded in having the paintings exhibited and written about till within a decade or so they were internationally known; night after night she worked at putting the letters in order and, twenty-four years after his death, published them for the first time (the following year she started translating the letters into English for a prospective English edition, and by the time of her death in 1925 had completed 526, four-fifths of the letters to Theo). "At her burial," writes her son in his Memoir of her, "the directors of the Wereldbibliotheek, the publishers of the Dutch edition of the letters, sent a wreath with the inscription: Faithfulness, Devotion, Love." She not only deserved it; by that time she had turned it into the family motto.

[4] From her diary: "I am taking boarders—now I must be careful that I shouldn't be degraded to a household drudge by all the housekeeping worries, but I must keep my spirit alive. Theo taught me so much about art, no let me rather say—he taught me much about life. Besides the care of the child he left me still another task, Vincent's work—to show it and let it be appreciated as much as possible." Nor was she Pollyanna or the Great Man's Widow or Sister-in-Law, as she proved by concluding the paragraph with a bleak statement that Vincent-like tells the truth and shames the devil: "I am not without an object in life, but I feel lonely and deserted." She had made no entries in the diary during the year and a half of her marriage; when she took it up again a few months after Theo's death her first sentence was, "*Tout n'est qu'un rêve!* [All is but a dream!]"

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JAMES FINN COTTER

The Gospel Proffer

ONE THING IS CLEAR IN READING THE GOSPELS: the contemporaries of Jesus faced a unique crisis. Either they accepted him wholeheartedly as their leader and deliverer or they perished, on earth and in the afterlife. Jesus confronted all classes with the challenge of an Israel liberated from money and power but not from the Romans. Nobody, not even his first followers, wanted to hear such a message from an unworldly savior. We know from the Jewish historian Josephus that the expectations for a Messiah-King had reached fever pitch during this period and would end with the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A. D. Guerrilla-fighters from Galilee grouped together in the desert, robbed and attacked, and battled even in the temple square; often they were as much despised by their own people as by the occupation troops. Any Christ (the Greek word for the Messiah-King) appeared to be a threat to the establishment.

No wonder Jesus avoided using the title for himself and wanted secrecy when possible until the true nature of his mission could be understood at least by a few chosen companions. He failed. His friends deserted him when he was arrested and the mockery on Golgotha went straight to the point: the savior for others could not save himself. The charge declared it publicly: "Jesus, King of the Jews." The Messiah who would rally his people in the wilderness, feed them as Moses did, appear at the temple pinnacle, and subdue the other kingdoms of the world had been so tempted at the beginning of his career and he had refused. By a bizarre last-minute substitution for a man with messianic pretensions, Jesus is put to death in the role he would not play. He suffered the very fate he had warned others against, cursed by men and by God.

In his finely-honed translation of the Gospels,[1] Richmond Lattimore still calls Barabbas and the two crucified with Jesus "robbers," in spite of his own translation of Mark 15:7: "The man called Barabbas was imprisoned among the insurgents who had done murder during the uprising." Pilate chose the Passover eve as a day when numbers of Jews could witness the execution and be warned against future uprisings. No translation, of course, can recreate the tension that underlies the Gospel text; even by the time the first version by Mark was written, some thirty-five years later, the exact nature of the charges against Jesus and the circumstances of his death had dimmed. Yet the truth lies buried there and each reader has an obligation to dig it out. Lattimore would agree entirely; he is bent on fidelity to the original vocabulary, idiom and syntax. I believe he succeeds in fashioning four distinct styles for his authors, in catching the simplicity and unpredictability of the Koine, and in writing a modern

[1] THE FOUR GOSPELS AND THE REVELATION, translated by *Richmond Lattimore*. Farrar, Straus & Giroux. $10.95.

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version that is highly readable because it blends the familiar with the new. To judge how it compares with other translations, I have chosen one sentence from Mark 1:35 and matched up nine versions. At the price of some monotony, the reader can judge the problems each translator faces in rendering the thirteen words of Greek:

> And in the morning, rising up a great while before day, he went out, and departed into a solitary place, and there prayed.
> —King James

> And in the morning, a great while before day, he rose and went out to a lonely place, and there he prayed.
> —Revised Standard

> Very early next morning he got up and went out. He went away to a lonely spot and remained there in prayer.
> —New English Bible

> Rising early the next morning, he went off to a lonely place in the desert: there he was absorbed in prayer.
> —New American Bible

> In the morning, long before dawn, he got up and left the house, and went off to a lonely place and prayed there.
> —Jerusalem Bible

> Very early the next morning, long before daylight, Jesus got up and left the house. He went out of town to a lonely place, where he prayed.
> —Good News Bible

> The next day he rose while it was still dark, and leaving the house, made his way into the open country and prayed there for a while.
> —E. V. Rieu

> Then, in the early morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a desert place, and there he prayed.
> —J. B. Phillips

> Then very early in the morning he got up and went out to a lonely place, and there he prayed.
> —Lattimore

Thirteen words in Greek have become twenty to twenty-seven in English. Lattimore comes closest to the brevity of the original, giving up any attempt to render "very early in the morning while it was still dark" which consists of three words in Greek (two are also used in Mark's resurrection narrative). Nor does Lattimore worry over the exact tense of "prayed" by adding words like "absorbed," "remained in" or "for a while." The words

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"house" and "town" do not appear in the original sentence. Lattimore sticks to what Mark wrote better than any other translator. The virtue here is to draw our attention to what the text really is saying rather than quibbling about the exact time of departure or the length of Jesus' prayer.

The scene described in Mark is straightforward yet symbolic. Jesus spent the day before in Capernaum curing the sick and casting out demons. After sunset, at Simon and Andrew's house, "the whole city was assembled before his door." "Rising early"—as he will on Easter morning—Jesus "set out and went off to a desert place"—the wilderness of the new covenant—"and there he prayed." Lattimore translates the following verses: "Simon and his companions went in search of him, and found him, and said to him: All are looking for you. He said to them: Let us go elsewhere, to the neighboring communities, so that I may preach there also; for that is what I set out to do." The verb "set out" is the same one that opens the passage: the redemptive passover has been telescoped in one paragraph. Jesus set out from the father to live in the wilderness of the world, in life, death and resurrection the same person, preaching through his disciples to ever-widening communities.

All four Gospels begin in the wilderness the mission of Jesus the Christ. His coming is announced by John the Baptist who immediately recognizes him by a sign from heaven as a deliverer from sins rather than from political oppression. In John 1:15-17, Lattimore has the Baptist testify: "[15] He who is coming after me was before me, because he was there before I was; [16] because we have all received from his fullness, and grace for grace. [17] Because the law was given through Moses; the grace and the truth came through Jesus Christ." In Greek the main clause in verse 15 is followed by three *hoti* ("because") clauses. But these three are hardly parallel in syntax or semantics. At the time of Origen, the Alexandrian exegetes read verse 16 as a quotation of the Baptist, but no modern scholar attributes it to him. Lattimore's wish for literalness leads him into a trap and he must leave verse 17 hanging with an incomplete clause. The problem seems to have been caused by an early editor who interpolated verse 15 into the Prologue hymn (along with verses 6-9). Verse 16 completes 14 and not 15: "And the word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of a single son from his father, full of grace and truth; [for] we have all received from his fullness, and grace for grace." Verse 15 has, in fact, been lifted from verse 30 and repeated here. In Lattimore's defense, we must admit that the confusion is not in his version but in the text. That still does not justify putting verse 16 into the Baptist's mouth. Not even the meddling editor intended it to be found there.

Besides his fidelity to the original *hoti* usage, Lattimore adheres to the strung-out *kai* ("and") narration that has been the bane for some readers. The style offended Augustine when he turned to scripture from his classical authors. Its virtues are spontaneity, surprise and urgency; its faults are monotony, ineptitude and incoherence. In the seven sentences it takes Luke to narrate the raising of the widow of Naim's son, the author em-

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ploys seventeen "and's." Lattimore includes them all and, like the King James Version, adds two of his own in order to avoid present participles. Yet the result is not disastrous, it is even charmingly effective: "And the corpse sat up and began to talk, and he gave him to his mother. And fear seized all of them, and they glorified God. . . " (7:15-16). Even Augustine ended by prizing these stories more than Vergil's hexameters.

The style reflects the uncompromising nature of its message. Matthew records these words: "Go in through the narrow gate; because wide and spacious is the road that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in through it; because narrow is the gate and cramped the road that leads to life, and few are they who find it" (7:13-14). By following the *hoti-hoti* parallelism, Lattimore echoes the contrasting play of the original. The choice of "cramped" seems inspired, rather than the usual "rough," "hard" or "narrow": it combines the senses of both confinement and difficulty. This translation often catches the contrasts that underlie the Aramaic fondness for hyperbole and wordplay. The language lacked shading; one either praised or blamed, loved or hated. The shock of reading Luke 14:26: "If someone comes to me and does not hate his father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, and even his own life also, he cannot be my disciple," remains in Lattimore's version but has been blunted in the *New American Bible* where "hate" becomes "turn away from" and in the *Good News Bible* where it is a matter of "love me more." The Hebraism in "hate" declares an absolute detachment from others and from one's self and a full acceptance of discipleship. It is the demand that this Jesus makes throughout his story and that renders acceptance of his message humanly impossible. We may explain, mitigate, compromise, but the master does not: "Sell what you own and give it away as charity; make yourselves purses that do not wear out, an infallible treasure house in heaven, where no thief attacks, no moth corrupts; for where your treasure is, there also will be your heart" (Luke 12:33-34). Well may this teacher ask: "But when the son of man comes, will he find faith on earth?" (Luke 18:8).

One benefit of Lattimore's translation is to draw us up short by sending us back to the root of a word or phrase: "For he who is smaller among you all, that one is great"—said when Jesus placed a child beside him; women bring their "babies" to him; the blind "have the joy of sight" given back to them; in seeking the Kingdom, "there is need of few things, or only one"; no one comes to Jesus "unless the father who sent me pulls him"; and "When you raise the son of man aloft, then you will know that I am." Lattimore puts no particular emphasis on the "I AM" sayings of John which have received recent critical attention. He seems to avoid its most patent expression: "Before Abraham came to be, I am," in favor of a doubtful reading: "I am from before Abraham was born." He misses here the emphatic touch he brings to other passages: "He who believes in me shall live, even if he dies, and everyone who lives and believes in me shall not die, ever" (John 11:25-26). And again: "No one has ever seen God; the only-born God who is in the bosom of his father, it is he who told of him" (John 1:18).

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Lattimore frequently finds the *mot juste* in a common word others have overlooked. For the old-fashioned "Abide with me," variously translated as "remain," "dwell" and "live on," he writes: "Stay with me, as I with you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it stays on the vine, so cannot you unless you stay with me" (John 15:4). Since the verb appears a dozen times in as many verses, its repetition becomes a powerful plea on the lips of the departing Jesus to "stay in my love." Lattimore displays a fondness for the old word, "precise but not pedantic" in Eliot's phrase, which reminds us of the antiquity of what we read: "No one sews a patch of unfulled cloth on an old coat"; "gleaming with a whiteness no fuller on earth could give"; "they ate the show bread"; and "the mint and the rue and every kind of potherb." Before he raises Lazarus from the dead, Jesus "raged at his own spirit, and harrowed himself. . . . Jesus once more was inwardly raging, and went to the tomb" (John 11:33,38). The synoptic parables taste like new wine in old skins: "the darnel in the field," "the trader looking for fine pearls" and the "dragnet cast into the sea and netting every kind of fish," all make the stories of the Kingdom come alive.

Lattimore has trouble with Jesus' idiomatic use of *Amen* to open rather than close important and prayerful statements—a practice unique to his manner of speaking. His translation avoids the archaic "Verily, verily" and the modern "I assure you," and sides with the Revised Standard's "Truly, truly," but without the comma. The result sounds artificial and out of keeping with the tone "where every word is at home." The Douay-Confraternity Version's reliance on the original Hebraic *Amen* would seem to be an obvious solution in keeping with the practice of the original Greek authors. Lattimore rightly retains "Gehenna" over "hell" (King James, etc.) and "rubbish-heap" (J. B. Phillips).

Nothing demands that everything in our translations be modernized because the Gospels themselves were written in everyday Koine. We lose more than we gain when Jesus tells the dead daughter of Jairus to "get up!" Lattimore shows more sense: "Talitha cum; which is, translated: Little girl, I say to you: Awake" (Mark 5:41). Style must reflect the truth that the words and events of Jesus in time were meant to be seen as also timeless, or rather contemporaneous with those with eyes to see and ears to hear. All four Gospels were written from a post-resurrection point of view. The authors did not intend to narrate a life of Jesus as he was then but a life of Jesus as he is now, remembered and loved because his followers stay in him and he in them. "The Kingdom of God is not coming in an observable way, nor will they say: Look, it is here; or: There. For see, the Kingdom of God is inside you" (Luke 17:20-21). While few commentators would agree with "inside you," since "in your midst" or "among you" appears more appropriate, the intent of the good news is clear: Jesus himself is the Kingdom he proclaims, and he comes to stay: "And behold, I am with you, all the days until the end of the world" (Matthew 28:20).

Despite my discomfort with some points of translation, I would recommend Lattimore's version of the Gospels, and of Revelation (previously

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published and included in this volume), to all who want to read, reflect on, and be refreshed by these singular documents. There they are, four rough-hewn rocks that have been kicked, chipped, kissed, and worshipped since they were first set down within thirty to seventy years after the events they record. They will not go away when we ignore them, and obviously we do not. Witness the dozens of translations, the numbers of study-guides, glossaries and commentaries, and the thriving field of hermeneutics. Lattimore's effort to be true to the text, to retain its turn of phrase and sentence structure, has been rewarded in the pages before us. He has worked no miracles, and biblical scholars will question some of his interpretations, but he has bestowed his own free gift to those familiar with the old but open to the new. G. M. Hopkins referred to this tradition of the word as "the gospel proffer, a pressure, a principle, Christ's gift." In Lattimore's version of the final words of Revelation: "Let him who is thirsty come, let him who wishes take the water of life, a free gift." Written on water, these words endure.

In saying good-bye to his friends the night before he died, Jesus summed up his method and message:

> I have told you this in riddles; but the time is coming when I shall speak in riddles no longer but will tell you in plain language about the father. On that day you will ask in my name, and I say that I will not ask my father on your behalf, for the father himself loves you because you have loved me and believed that I came from the father. I came from my father and went into the world. I leave the world again and go back to my father. His disciples said: See, now you are talking in plain language and tell us no more riddles. Now we know that you know all and have no need for anyone to ask you. By this we believe that you came from God. Jesus answered them: Now you believe? The time is coming, and it has come, for you to be scattered each to his own place and leave me alone. And I am not alone, because my father is with me.
>
> —John 16:25-32

Even in this wonderful exchange, the riddles remain, but the plain language has the same solidity of stone we have learned to expect from scripture. In that stone we can imagine a two-edged sword waiting for a hero to pull it out and to slay our dragons. Lattimore has given the blade a hearty yank and handed it, cold and gleaming, over to us to put to good use as a defense against beasts and a trophy of victory.

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BERT O. STATES

The Piranesi Effect: Alone and Well in Prison

THE SINGULAR THING about Piranesi's *Carceri d'Invenzione*—especially the famous Plate VII that graces the jacket of Victor Brombert's book[1]—is that imprisonment is only a pretext. When architecture so radically dwarfs its practical function we look either for the religious or for some variation of the honorific. We find both in the *carceri:* the real theme, one might say, is the representation of limitlessness. Infinity begins here, in stone, in this unlikely geometry of spiraling passages, catwalks, drawbridges, and towers rising in a bath of light toward some hypothetical exterior. To the trapped eye, it is as if space had been bound in only to release its attribute: the presentation of a vista would be tautological. In short, we have here a "poetic precinct" that confers on imprisonment a privileged value, a spirituality. Squint and you would mistake it for a cathedral; and this is more or less what prison meant to the Romantic imagination.

Brombert's book is a well-guided tour through literary prisons from Pascal and Borel, passing through Stendhal, Hugo, Nerval, Baudelaire, and Huysmans, to the ideological realism of Sartre and Camus, with brief glimpses into dozens of other famous cells. There is nothing fancy about the approach or the methodology. Brombert pretty well lets French literature describe its own prisons. The considerable achievement of his book is to have traced the prison image so intrepidly through its vicissitudes (one thinks of Javert stalking Jean Valjean), allowing it to perform its strange historical spiral around what we might call the self/other armature, the basic constant of the image. One could not have imagined, in advance, that the prison image was so ubiquitous and so adaptable to so many moods. The fact is, we probably overlook it in reading (at least in its more indirect forms: the trap, the enclosure, the city) because it has become transparent with use. The other consideration is that *prison* is one of those dialectical words—like innocence, revolution, salvation—that implies an opposite or a submerged antonym against which the mind unconsciously reflects it (the word *prison* is actually imprisoning the word *freedom*); and it is the peculiar nature of the dialectical image that it can, so doubly charged, reverse its field. The "in," as Brombert says of Hugo, can come to signify the "out" by virtue of a shift of values. So prison is less a word than a model of a complex situation. In fact, the proposition we derive from the book is that *any* tension in self/other, private/social, inside/outside relations is likely to seek the prison image—not simply as a metaphorical lament (as in Hamlet's "Denmark is a prison"), but as a behavioral

[1] THE ROMANTIC PRISON, by *Victor Brombert.* Princeton University Press. $15.00.

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paradox. To illustrate, we can reduce the argument of the book to three overlapping subpropositions, or phases: (1) Put a man in prison and he will not only dream of freedom, he will achieve it; (2) Take his prison away and he will invent another, to his own specifications; (3) Exile him from the bond of suffering other prisoners share, and he becomes a prisoner of his own exclusion and guilt.

The first is, of course, the Romantic phase proper. Physical imprisonment provokes either a movement toward an inner center (the discovery of self) or a spiritual escape (the discovery of infinity). The patron-saint is Prometheus, "the chained liberator, admirable in the bitter enjoyment of his own tragedy" (page 113). Thus, through Stendhal, Hugo and Nerval (chiefly) we are in a "happy prison," despite certain Gothic inconveniences (rats, oozing walls, slimy creatures, sadistic jailors) and of course there is considerable variation on what there is to be happy about. Prison can be: a threshold, a place of initiation, of lucidity, intimacy, withdrawal, renunciation, a rebirth, a liberation from time (Stendhal); an expansion toward infinity, a sanctuary of freedom and light, an enclosure within the eternal present (Hugo); "an atmosphere of unutterable bliss" where the jailor is jealous of the prisoner's freedom to dream (Nerval). The only real complaint here would be that of Julien Sorel—that the door could not be locked from the inside.

In the middle, or City, phase of the evolution, the prison disappears but is replaced by the room. The theme is self-enclosure, escape from "the others"; salvation through claustrophobia: "It is certainly not a coincidence that the poetic prestige of the prison image corresponds culturally to a period when art becomes increasingly the subject of art, and thought the subject of thought, as the writer indulges in his mirror disease. Retirement into an inner exile is a characteristic temptation of decadentism. The taste for hermetic, nocturnal existence and withdrawal to the protective hothouse go hand in hand with fear of life, of action, of commitment" (page 175). For Huysmans this salvation takes the form of a "refined reclusion" in which the soul is kept "nice and warm" in a hermetically sealed womb/boudoir, a veritable solipsism of furnishings, fabrics and colors. Huysmans would not have been at all happy in Piranesi's prison, unless in some privately commissioned cloister at the bottom of the *abîme,* suitably lighted for the display of his "trinkets" and books. Baudelaire, on the other hand, is best described as a closet agoraphiliac; that is, for Baudelaire, it was necessary to be bound in a nutshell before one could see the kingdom of infinite space: the smaller the place of confinement, the easier the evocation of vista ("... infinity seems deeper when it is constricted ..." page 143). Piranesi would be ideal for Baudelaire, assuming he was assigned a room with a view.

Finally, in the third phase we arrive, with Camus, Malraux and Sartre, at collective penal servitude and a new problem: could a prison without privacy still serve as a poetic subject? This is not a problem in aesthetics as much as a problem in moral consciousness:

> If the prison theme has evolved, it is largely because totalitarian ideologies have relegated the happy cell of humanistic individualism and po-

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> etic reverie to the status of a reactionary anachronism. Private salvation, much like private happiness, almost came to appear as morally offensive. Stendhal's *chasse au bonheur,* even if such a pursuit of felicity led to the Farnese dungeon or to the charterhouse, was no longer conceivable without a sense of guilt. A character in Camus' *La Peste* sums up this malaise of individualism: " . . . there may be something shameful in being happy alone" (pages 182–183).

Prison is now an unutterable nightmare and we can no longer judge Brombert's book by its cover. Against the dream vision of Plate VII we might pose the recently discovered aerial "view" of Auschwitz, caught unintentionally in 1944 by the matter-of-fact eye of the reconnaissance camera while scouting more important sites. After more than three decades we see clearly the logic of this awesome architectural design (form now follows function, not fancy): reception center here, living quarters there, gas chambers and crematoria upper left. But even on this site, prison remains a "privileged image." The very terror of the "shared cell" and the spectre of collective death opens the possibility of collective liberation, a "profound rebirth," as Solzhenitsyn puts it, based not upon the reveries of solitude ("Solitude," he says, "was precisely what was lacking in the *sharashka,*" page 207) but on a dark community of suffering. This is much too diverse a theme to summarize here, but it comes to its paradoxical limit, perhaps, with Sartre's heroes who develop "a morbid jealousy of the victim, a yearning for pain as an initiation into a forbidden brotherhood"(page 194): hence the prison of exclusion; imprisonment in the outside.

So it turns out that there are always prisons, or freedoms, on both sides of the wall. As a literary image, prison is essentially a place of discovery and recognition of the mysterious boundary between social existence and the forgotten possibilities of the self. In a suggestive way, the specific of Brombert's book actually opens out on more general themes that reach beyond the book's contribution to French literary studies (which I leave to better qualified people to assess). As an example of what I mean: we have long assumed that Romanticism somehow radically altered the tragic vision. Brombert is not really interested in this question, nor should he have been. But the prison image has been a constant in tragic literature since Aeschylus' net and it would be hard to disagree with Malraux (as quoted by Brombert) that "the experience of incarceration provide[s] the basic elements of any tragic structure" (pages 176–177). I think the experience also bears on the central question of tragedy, which is, broadly speaking, one of liberation in confinement, or *vice versa.* The metaphysical root of tragedy, as Lukács expresses it, is "the longing for selfhood." Tragedy's question is: "How can essence come alive?" This much the tragic and Romantic visions have in common, but here the similarity begins to shade into difference.

For one thing, few classic tragic heroes die in a real prison. There is something about *becoming* tragic that requires the high road of the sphere of choice. This usually takes the form of a direct assault (hubris) on the social and divine orders. With the help of Fate, the tragic hero creates a

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prison literally built of his freedom, his own "yesterdays." As a dialectic of freedom and Fate, tragedy is thus an education in becoming "absolute for death"—or, as Lukács says, tragedy is a science of death moments, the particular content of the tragic life being only a preparation for an essential and timeless "moment" in which everything is now seen to have been causally necessary yet ultimately irrelevant. This realization stuns the hero into silence.

Romantic literature takes this causal process out of the hero's hands and puts it into the hands of "the others." What remains tragic in the Romantic hero, of course, is the potential for soul-awakening; but what brings the awakening about is the abrupt intervention of the regime in his heretofore other-directed life. One is *put* into prison, with or without just cause. "You are here to suffer," Borel's jailor says, and that is essentially what Fate says to tragic man as he steps freely into the trap. But thanks to the remarkable elasticity of the Romantic soul, the suffering is converted into a savoring; it becomes the occasion for a *lyrisme cellulaire,* an endless monologue that can be heard only when echoed back to the soul from the indispensable walls of the cell. In other words, Romantic imprisonment was not a tension between freedom and Fate but a tension between the self and a "protective" world that had brought it lyrically to life by putting it in the last place where one could be alone in the industrial revolution.

This seems to me a basic distinction between the tragic and the Romantic visions. Moreover, we can even see the Romantic underpinnings of bourgeois realism in its characteristic event, the "imprisonment" of a sensitive hero in the sociological trap of the living room and his (more often *her*) escape through the visionary side-door of a private dream. Suicide, the characteristic solution of the Romantic soul from Kleist, in real life, to Hedda Gabler, in fiction, is not an act of desperation but a way of securely locking the cell door from the inside.

Granted, all this is debatable and certainly dependent on where one wants to draw lines. In any case, my purpose is not to isolate "isms" or to exercise a *lyrisme nostalgique* over the so-called death of tragedy. It is reasonable to assume that any truly generic attitude does not die but adapts to shifting historical circumstances. This is obviously what happened to tragedy—or, if you wish, to the literature of self-discovery—as it passed through the Romantic dreamscape to the modern world, and Brombert's book, apart from its more intentional uses, allows us to view this panoramic journey from the perspective of one of its most enduring symbols.

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VERNON YOUNG

No One Said It Would Be Easy

THE EXALTED ESTIMATE of Geoffrey Hill among American critics would be astonishing—in view of Hill's preoccupation with Great Britain and pre-Tudor Christianity—if we were unaware that poetry critics in America, by and large, are poets who are also professors. Hill is a poet's poet, readily appreciated in the Academy by those overwhelmed by his erudition—the most florescent since David Jones's—by his weighting of the single word with roots and cognates, by his aloofness from the empirical self: above all, by his view of history (i.e. secular history) as Original Sin. The latter inference was emphasized by Harold Bloom in what should be known as his *notorious* introduction to Hill's previous volume published here, wherein he announced that Offa (in the *Mercian Hymns*) "is seen as the master of a Primal scene of Instruction, an imposition of order that fixates subsequent repression in others, which means to start an inescapable tradition." (I wonder if Hill would ratify this constipated Freudian paraphrase of his setting.) What Bloom is saying, if anything, is that fifteen hundred years of English history has been an error: everything that is, is wrong. Let us return for a second to the "Primal scene" and to an ostensibly independent "poem" in the Mercian sequence.

> He divided his realm. It lay there like a dream. An ancient land, full of strategy. Ramparts of compost pioneered by red-helmeted worms. Hemlock in ambush, night-soil, tetanus. A wasp's nest ensconced in the hedge-bank, a reliquary or wrapped head, the corpse of Cernunnos pitching dayward its feral horns.

You may call this a "hymn" if you choose. To me it is prose. I've been speaking something like it all my life. But what heaped joy for the scholar! Note the older denotation of *strategy*, as something closer to treasons or wiles—*stratagems*; the archaic version of *pioneered* (tunneled); the careful distinction between container and the thing contained in "reliquary *or* wrapped head"; the enticing reference to Cernunnos, a Celtic god identified by the Romans with Pluto-Hades; altogether, the consistent ambience of night, poison and death—the landscape as initial predator. Poetry as an object to be analyzed before it can be fully enjoyed is here exemplified.

In the present volume, *Tenebrae*,[1] the diction, equally scrupulous, is less contorted: the prevailing subject is the gentler pieties of what Hill is pleased to call Platonic, rather than Roman Catholic, England. There are stanzas of beauty in this exiguous collection, a passionless theocratic beauty, enhanced whenever pastoral is invoked.

[1] TENEBRAE, by *Geoffrey Hill.* Houghton Mifflin. $7.95.

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> The pigeon purrs in the wood; the wood has gone;
> dark leaves that flick to silver in the gust,
> and the marsh-orchids and the heron's nest,
> goldgrimy shafts and pillars of the sun.
> "Idylls of the King"

Since I have a distinct impression that Hill can conceive an England without the Tudor Supremacy or the Anglican Compromise, I find it more difficult to grant him belief with my poetic assent than I did with his predecessor who deplored us all so eloquently. We are brought very close to *him* in the title poem, but not close enough to relegate him.

> This is the ash-pit of the lily-fire,
> this is the questioning at the long tables,
> this is true marriage of the self-in-self,
> this is a raging solitude of desire,
> this is the chorus of obscene consent,
> this is a single voice of purest praise.

I can't believe that such an incantation cost Hill very much. It is in any case a far cry from "The river's tent is broken; the last fingers of leaf/ Clutch and sink into the wet bank"; or "After the torchlight red on sweaty faces"; or, for that matter, from the final stanza of W. H. Auden's "New Year Letter" ("O Unicorn among the cedars," *et. seq.*). But in that direction, Donald Hall stands, blocking the sun. "When in the future flustered doctoral candidates confuse Auden with Austin, when Larkin becomes a small figure in the shadow of Hardy . . . Geoffrey Hill will remain the monumental English poet of the latter twentieth century." *I am Sir Oracle.* What makes the statement comic is that it projects the personal choice of the critic into a future of which he knows nothing; it fails to allow for the unpredictable shifts in common, or uncommon, opinion; it refuses to credit the advent of a poet superior to Hill who may even now be writing his first poems; it is nonsense. (Who the devil *is* Austin, by the way?) That neither Hall nor myself will be around at the far-off date he conjures is a pity, for I'd like to lay a substantial bet that Auden will still be read when flustered doctoral candidates confuse Hill with Hall.

Joseph Brodsky is as convinced about the international eminence of Czeslaw Milosz.[2] When presenting his candidate for the 1978 Neustadt Prize, he wrote: " . . . Czeslaw Milosz is one of the greatest poets of our time, perhaps the greatest." His argument has a lot going for it, although certain details of his advocacy are puzzling.

> "We . . . find ourselves confronting a severe and relentless mind of such intensity that the only parallel one is able to think of is that of the biblical characters—most likely Job. But the scope of the loss experienced

[2] BELLS IN WINTER, by *Czeslaw Milosz.* Translated by the author and *Lillian Vallee.* Ecco. $8.95.

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by Milosz was—not only from purely geographical considerations—somewhat larger.

By geographical considerations he means the devastation and capture of modern Poland—and of Lithuania, where Milosz was born—and the poet's self-exile in California. I really don't know how one would go about comparing satisfactorily the scope of Job's loss and that of Milosz, or of anyone else. The alleged affinity strikes me as utterly inappropriate, the more so as Milosz is Catholic and his poems have frequently an Attic composure.

My generation was lost. Cities too. And nations.
But all this a little later. Meanwhile, in the window, a swallow
Performs its rite of the second. That boy, does he already suspect
That beauty is always elsewhere and always delusive?
Now he sees his homeland. At the time of the second mowing.
Roads winding uphill and down. Pine groves. Lakes.
An overcast sky with one slanting ray.
And everywhere men with scythes, in shirts of unbleached linen
And the dark-blue trousers that were common in the province.
He sees what I see even now. Oh but he was clever.
Attentive, as if things were instantly changed by memory.
Riding in a cart, he looked back to retain as much as possible.
Which means he knew what was needed for some ultimate moment
When he would compose from fragments a world perfect at last.
"From The Rising of the Sun"—II

This is entirely characteristic of the Milosz tone: elegant and prophetic; concrete and synoptical; at once nostalgic and intellectually reconciled, if with a trace of mockery. It has *not* the accent of Job! And Milosz does not display "a severe and relentless mind." He always relents, if only to gather breath and probe again the irreversible past. "Bells in Winter" is a choice example. After impersonating a Brother "returning from far Transylvania. . . . Absolved of care about our paltry life," Milosz abruptly repudiates the Pauline vision with a derisive parenthesis.

No, I have never been to Transylvania.
I have never brought messages from there to my church.
But I could have.
This is an exercise in style.
The pluperfect tense
Of countries imperfective.

Should you be reading Milosz for the first time, with expectations raised by Brodsky, in good faith, of a Job-like anguish, you will miss the *essential* voice of the poet: one of self-tormenting but fastidious irony, irradiated with wonderful re-invocations of his lost homeland which, in turn, drive him to investigate, in other lives, the leveling of personality, rank and achievement by the inexorable forces: history and nature. Milosz is tor-

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mented by time and identity: one of his leading obsessions is the fortuity of being himself, the haunting wonder that there can be for anyone else a world of place and event *as he sees it*. In one poem, "Temptation," he is led to speculate:

> Had I died long ago nothing would have changed.
> The same stars, cities and countries
> Would have been seen with other eyes.
> The world and its labors would go on as they do.

We cannot minimize the tragedy of deracination. "The individual cannot get his bearings in the universe," Ortega y Gasset has written, "except through his race, because he is immersed in it like the drop of water in the passing cloud." Yet we should also remember that to ask disingenuous questions is part of the Polish syndrome. Brodsky suggests—I think correctly—that Milosz' poetry expresses the unbearable realization that the more time separates a man from his experience, the less chance there is for him to comprehend it. Neither Socrates nor Proust would have thought so! Behind several of these poems, one hears the astonished words of another "Pole" in exile: "I had jumped—it seems."

A pertinent introduction to the world of Yannis Ritsos is enacted in a single verse of Milosz' *Ars Poetica?* (Note that even this rubric bears a question mark!)

> The purpose of poetry is to remind us
> how difficult it is to remain just one person,
> for our house is open, there are no keys in the doors,
> and invisible guests come in and out at will.

Ritsos' poetry is filled with invisible guests, wilfully invisible to one another at times, if merely inscrutable to the poet. And this partial visibility becomes more tantalizing, to the limits of the grotesque, in poems written under the pressure of dictatorship and resistance in Greece. (Among the ironies that crowd: Communism, the Abominable Snowman of Mandelstam and Milosz, has been for Ritsos the deferred Messiah!) From a landscape which has been perennially a subject for poetry since Homer, Ritsos' copious verses have assembled a landscape of their own which, if it resembles the illogical scenography of surrealist paintings, should not be termed unconditionally surreal. In typical works of the plastic medium which goes by that name, there is no common ground of experience between the viewer and the painting; disjunctive elements are either to be accepted in the spirit of anything-relates-if-the-artist-says-so, or interpretation is coaxed from the more lurid premises of Freudianism. Whereas the disjunctures in Ritsos' poems, becoming sharper and less amenable to deft interpretation over the years, were derived first from the intrinsic isolation and perplexity which Ritsos saw (oppugnant, surely, to a belief in Communism!) as man's condition. Later they were intensified by the treasons and concealments of civil war, in which equivocation be-

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comes a principal mode of discourse; the significance of every gesture is a compound riddle.

Among the earlier poems (those in the Edmund Keeley book)[3] non-human (even impalpable) phenomena are as sentient and transitive as human beings. "The night went by with its mouth full of speechless water. . . . And/ the mountains/ grew larger and sharper like the teeth of one who hungered"; "The four windows hang rhyming quatrains of sky and sea in the rooms"; "The yellow in the curtains trembles"; "The music rushes out into the/ street, shivers under the light on the corner." And, closer to the appositions of menace: "The afternoon is all fallen plaster, black stones, dry thorns./ The afternoon has a difficult color made up of old footsteps halted/ in mid-stride,/ of old jars buried in the courtyard, covered by fatigue and straw. . . . " Fewer of these pathetic fallacies appear in the later poems but long before the poet's arrest by the Papadopalos regime in 1967, which spurred some of his most vitriolic output, the dominating ambience of the Ritsos poem—this would return in another, more oppressed context—was that remarkable gift he has for suggesting the sound and color of silence, the impending instant, the transfixed hush. A poem such as "Incense" pictures men at a moment when—unconsciously, to be sure—they are more closely related to the cosmos than to their fellows:

> He gazed at the morning through the windowpanes. He felt with precision
> that the blue rolls along the bird's skin or the cloud's.
> He suspected that the same sense of touch was at the tree's disposal also.
> The smoke emerged from the chimneys as though confessing the secret
> of heat in the rooms that were still closed.
>
> In this way, every morning, all the houses smoke.
> And the men, emerging early for work,
> light up their cigarettes while still on the threshold, as though remembering
> some unknown, unapproachable deity entirely their own.

Edmund Keeley, whose abilities as a translator from modern Greek are unsurpassed, interprets the poet's thirty-year journey from *Parentheses, 1946-1947* to *The Distant, 1975*, as "a progress from his focus on so-called simple things and more or less abortive gestures to a focus on bare . . . essentials and primitive rituals performed by those whose deity appears to be an infinitely distant, absolutely white, unapproachable and silent ambiguity." After 1972 this description is drastically modified by

[3] RITSOS IN PARENTHESES. Translations and Introduction by *Edmund Keeley*. Princeton University Press. $17.50; $5.95.

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many of the poems translated by Kimon Friar as *Scripture of the Blind.*[4] Friar places a welcome emphasis, in his exhaustive introduction, on the extent to which Ritsos' sardonic vision, acrid and contemporary, is yet imbued with the ancient Greek sensibility and reminds us, apropos the title, that "All Greek literature, from ancient to modern times, is haunted by the shades of its three great Blind Men: Homer, Tiresias, and Oedipus. . . . All but one of these poems," he tells us further, were written " . . . at white heat, sometimes two or three in a day, in a concentrated two-month period . . . at the height of the junta years, when it seemed that tyranny, oppression, torture and degradation were to be the fate of Greece for many more years to come." While there are among these poems the always characteristic ones arising from "that deep inaction where music reigns," the majority are peopled with monstrous characters, deformed relationships, armless statues and headless dolls, the dead in refrigerators, "guards, prisons, flashlights, and old women, old women, old women"—all the horror, the betrayals, the fatigue, and the corruption that accompany a war against tyranny which has gone on too long and bred its own maggots. In the final pages a kind of silence again reigns.

> Nights with guns firing and walls. Afterward, quiet.
> Scrubbed floors. The chair legs, straight.
> Behind the door, a second door and a third; between them
> insulating cotton of the kind used to stuff the mouths
> of the hungry or the dead. The heroes—he said—
> have grown white, dear God, they've grown fat and small.
> "1972"

Osip Mandelstam has come to represent the classic victim of totalitarianism in our time, his shadow looming behind all the other poets broken, silenced or exiled: Lorca, Hernandez, Ritsos, Milosz, Horst Bienek, Nazim Hikmet—how many, many more? As his fate and his work are surely by now familiar, I want only to use my limited space to commend the baroque variations of Joseph Brodsky on the historical uniqueness of Mandelstam's art[5] as well as the compact definitions of the verse and the man by Donald Davie and James Greene.[6] At the same time I want to question the necessity for either of these translations. Mr. Brodsky offers no explanation for those of Bernard Meares. Mr. Davie concedes that the translation by W. S. Merwin and Clarence Brown is "the most readable and accomplished," yet concludes his discriminating, if arguable, account of European and American poetic form with a defence of the Greene translation, to me inexplicable when put to the test: "it is faithful as never

[4] SCRIPTURE OF THE BLIND, by *Yannis Ritsos*. Translated from the Greek with an Introduction by *Kimon Friar* and *Kostas Myrsiades*. Ohio University Press. $20.00

[5] OSIP MANDELSTAM, 50 POEMS. Translated by *Bernard Meares*. Introductory Essay by Joseph Brodsky. Persea Books, Inc. $7.95.

[6] OSIP MANDELSTAM. Poems chosen and translated by *James Greene*. Forewords by Nadezhda Mandelstam and Donald Davie. Shambhala. $4.95.

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before, because as never before there is no line of the Russian poems that is not made *poetry* in English."

Let me share my discomfort with line-by-line readings of the first stanza of "Tristia" (page 47 in Meares, page 30 in Greene). Meares: "I've acquired the craft of separating/ In the unbraided laments of the night." Of separating *what*? you first ask. Separating oneself *from* someone else is the meaning; hence, Greene's line is less misleading, although weak: "I have taken to heart the lesson of goodbyes"—but his *bareheaded* laments in the next phrase is no great improvement on *unbraided* laments. Following: which is more inept, "With oxen chewing and tedious waiting" or "Oxen chew, waiting lengthens"? Greene's, the latter, has at least a consistent predicate. "I revere the ritual of that night when cockerels crow" (Meares) is (perhaps) less stilted than "And I bow to ceremonial cock-crowing nights," which then goes into the bathos of "When lifting their lading of grief for the journey/ Eyes red with crying search the horizon": equally banal and, in this wording, low-Victorian with an Anglo-Saxon tag, is Meares. "When tear-stained eyes strained afar and long,/ Assuming the burden of wayfarer's woe." Here's the last line, supposed to resolve the melody (first, find your melody). "And singing of Muses blends with the weeping/ of women" (Greene). "And womens' weeping mingled with the Muses' song." Meares has the poor benefit of rhyme, *afar and long/Muses' song*. Shall we put this together so that it reads as a poem instead of a tentative gloss?

> I made myself an expert in farewells
> by studying laments, the nightfall of a woman's hair.
> Oxen chew their cud; anticipation lags;
> it is the town's last restless hour;
> and I praise that ritual night when the cocks crowed
> and eyelids, heavy with the griefs that pass,
> opened to the light, while her weeping flowed
> into the sound of the Muses singing.

My specimen translation is by Stanley Kunitz, from his new translation. I believe you might achieve a similar result with any poem in these two volumes, had you such a Third Man.

As unlikely as it may first appear, the diverse ends which ellipsis can be made to serve are suggestively illustrated by contrasting the poems of Leslie Ullman[7] with those of Yannis Ritsos. Both poets have a taste for metamorphosis and the abrupt *non sequitur* of place and time; both poets tease one with the generic antagonist, identified only as "he," "she," "the man," "the children." Otherwise, no poems could be further apart in a fundamental reckoning. Leslie Ullman proceeds from images on self—"She calls on her self/ She loosens her hair before the woman in the mirror who smiles/as the man would smile/ at such long hair"—to projec-

[7] NATURAL HISTORIES, by *Leslie Ullman*. Foreword by Richard Hugo. Yale University Press. $3.95.

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tions of a self seen (or not seen) by others, to disparities of self and occasion, in order to confirm the perpetual elusiveness of personality. She shows an almost fanatical concern with *hands*, as if the sense of touch were the only reliable sense when sight, hearing and speech serve to extend the common misunderstanding. Opening lines of her stanzas are frequently startling: "Her bedroom smelled of trees" . . . "A woman will appear in place of light/ wearing the colors/ she wore while a man/ reached toward her one night/at a time" . . . "The woman inside every woman/lights the candles." Some poems may leave you at their threshold forever. Others are instantly accessible and unmercifully concrete (cf. "In Barcelona You Tried to Scream," or "Midwife," which begins, "She smells blood in her hair/ and dreams of crouching at the limits/of her skin." These, and "The Woman at the Desk" I found notably provocative:

> The woman at the desk answers the phone
> and remembers nothing.
> She has put her breasts to sleep.
> Loose blouse, a rope of pearls,
> the cup of hot milk. In the morning
> the sheets are scarcely wrinkled.
> She dives into the pearls.
> All day they rise and fall.
> *
> She removes each garment
> from the skin she's always worn,
> from the body he left quietly
> eating his soup
> and growing thinner.
> She kicks off her shoes.
> In someone else's youth
> men guarded their women with spears.
> *
> While she sleeps, an immense
> darkness gathers beneath her skin.
> The small house
> holds off the invisible hands.
> Sometimes she dreams of a man's arm
> around her shoulders.
> *
> Stuffed against the coat
> her breasts want to be naked.
> They bloom here
> as though they lived in the tropics.
> In some other life she traveled light.
> In some other life she slipped away at dawn,
> scarcely disturbing the thick branches.

My settled opinion of these poems is that they are not only oblique and

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deceptively exclusive, they are also lovely; they beautifully justify the hesitation you may have to master to make them your own.

During a previous state of grace, Karl Shapiro once confided: "If a young poet should ask me what to do I would tell him: Praise something, *anything*!" Philip Schultz, who with Dave Smith received the Poetry award of the American Academy of Arts and Letters in 1979, has taken Shapiro's advice.[8] In these exuberant poems he praises "mountains of chopped liver/ and sliced cakes big as Buffalo"; he praises, by way of Darwin On Tortoises, "the instincts of passion/ and the consequence of numbers"; he praises the paintings of Cézanne ("Color is the tree inside the tree and the skull/ in the mountain of night"—I *do* wonder what on earth he means!); he praises the "statuesque immobility," "the world of absence" and the "anger of form" in a picture by Arshile Gorky; he praises Marie: "At her touch the nerves in my fingertips jump/ like fish/ flipping upstream against all common sense." Schultz is an unabashed romantic with an infectious readiness to persuade one that he *is* indeed "going always somewhere where no one had been before,/ my arms banging at my side like wings." His excess of high spirits and his comparable eagerness to be crucified—moderately—with *les misérables* would be less tolerable if he were not so disarmingly inventive and so infallibly *pictorial*. (He describes Kafka as "that bugeyed sword-swallower.") Dancing between the Scylla of William Saroyan and the Charybdis of Thomas Wolfe, he is writing some of the most effulgent and bizarre love poems in America ("The Secret," "A Prayer," "Somewhere in Spain," "Would You Believe," "Want," "Like Wings"), without betraying our modernist reservations on the subject. "Fear is the edge," he murmurs (halfway through the opulent lyricism of "Like Wings"), "that is the risk that is loving./ It stinks of blood, it draws sharks." Infrequently, he flirts with existential sublimity which tempts him towards the dangers of compound apposition: "we feel a splendor/ that is the passion and the pain and the mystery of our lives." When he pens "Savage Feelings" (they are less savage than rueful) he is more convincing by far.

> My friends are knocking themselves off so fast
> I call hourly before meeting anyone for lunch.
> Everything has become a matter of time.
> Posters on buses say: Keep It Up!
> I cannot keep it up.
> Nobody I know can keep it up.

But he *can* keep it up, which may be why I find his sympathy-poems on down-and-outs or factory-in-the-field America vicarious; he is so good at larking in the idiom that his empathetic gloom seems by contrast histrionic. Though not invariably; an unforced exception is "Song for a Sheared-Beaver Coat." Lately I have read so many sentimental poems about European immigrant parents by poets otherwise as imperturbably

[8] LIKE WINGS, by *Philip Schultz*. The Viking Press. $8.95.

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American as pumpkins that I have become allergic to the genre. But this one is closeup and indelible as it recalls a Yiddish-Russian grandmother who "pounded meat bloodless Fridays," pinned the poet "to the wall with her Baltic blue eye," "wore a fur coat all summer" and died on a July afternoon.

Schultz's *tour de force* of fluency, however, is his counterfeit presentment of a brother-under-the-skin, his "Cossack" poem, "Of The Pit": a shame I can't quote it entire; its full effect depends on the variants of the first-line apostrophe, "Listen, it hasn't been all wild dancing, Brother." But I hope that the end sequence will convey the wit and the whiplash undertone of the whole.

> I do ninety pushups lefthanded & ask the ladies
> if I'm a bentback hoarder, hah! I've fought the wars
> & sired whole tribes of draft dodgers, so pass the vodka, Boychick.
> You see that cloud of dust lifting off the plains?
> That's me coming all the way from Egypt
> with the incense of darkest knowledge in my nose,
> the raw ambition & oil of know-how between my legs.
> That's me wearing the teeth of pagans, stones from the Black Sea,
> round my neck. For I am of the pit, the blossoming wart
> on the nose of wildest desire.
> I eat whole hogs raw & without the salt of guilt.
> I killed Christ, I admit it!

I like to think that this may be an updated travesty of Alexander Blok's "The Scythians." Whatever the source it's a super-addition to the poetry of pleasure, which may well precede the poetry of wisdom but ought never to be cancelled by it.

I read *Long Island Light*[9] with growing disbelief, soon exchanged for acceptance, that in a single volume there could be so many poems celebrating, with perfect pitch, the natural world and what we have made of it. Actually, and to simplify, there are three kinds of poem in this collection; those that revive the frontier through the personalities of early American naturists (Parkman, Washington Irving, George Catlin, Audubon); those "remembered because of violence" that chronicle the necessary, and unnecessary, cruelties of survival, and those in which Heyen follows Jeffers' resolve, "I will touch things and things and no more thoughts," poems that crystallize, with an absence of exhortation, "The pure poise/of an object" (usually a creature—pike, cardinal, swan, the pigeons of Audubon's day—but consummately, the tree in "Oak Autumn").

We are enabled, with many of these poems, to follow their conversion from prose, not to say prosaic, notations—at least we are supplied the larva and the butterfly—because the center pages are a memoir in which personal reminiscence, the documented decline and defacement of Long Island, letters and dreams, jostle one another. Some of this is Village

[9] LONG ISLAND LIGHT, Poems and a Memoir, by *William Heyen.* Vanguard. $7.95.

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Smithy talk (a profuse amount of mooning over Walt Whitman and Gary Snyder); more of it, for the best, regional stuff dignified with a spate of research and affection.

Central to this memoir, and to many of the poems that frame it, is Heyen's shooting of a cat in his boyhood, the traumatic episode that triggered twenty years of remorse, made him a poet of ecology in the most comprehensive sense and was probably responsible for the concern that led him to write *The Swastika Poems* which were met with a burst of acclaim in 1977 from everyone afflicted by that reckless misgiving, "universal guilt." Heyen did not ride his thesis; born in Brooklyn of German parents, he was impelled, so he claimed, to shudders of culpability by association. Yet the present poems, with their finally purgative versions of the cat-murder (there are two, each a fervent and subtle distillation) suggest a more complex provenance for the poet's identification with the Holocaust. While there are more verses in this book that recite man's slaughter of the innocents than there are those that face the internecine principle throughout nature, Heyen is obviously not blind to the tooth-and-claw drama which is a commonplace in that other realm while he is drafting poems. "The Circle" recounts his pained discovery of a dead possum in the snow; nearby, the "talon scars" of a horned owl. After reading this poem, one should turn to the single most extraordinary sentence in the Memoir, a rumination as the poet walks in the dark (pages 90-91).

> In the black and fragrant shade of the dogwoods that line the road, time and space expand to timelessness, morality to amorality, until a thought that has always been on my mind, the thought that it would be of no true universal consequence were I to enter a home and kill its inhabitants as they sleep, that this act would in no way matter, becomes a truism, becomes an emotional and intellectual fact.

Insofar as Heyen's Long Island is a microcosm of the larger devastation of the American continent, "Smith's Ride" is one of his most inclusive poems. A certain Richard Smith, in 1660, was given by Nissequogue Indians, in exchange for cattle, guns and trinkets, as much land as he could encircle between sunrise and sunset, *riding a bull.* Today the area is Smithtown Township and "every Halloween the balls/of Smith's bronze bull are painted gold." In seven short sequences, as Smith rides his bull around the meadows and the streams and under the "leaves uncurling into light, the New World's gift, the island/within an island, the brain's skull . . . " the poem becomes another small epic of the America which, by common consent, vanishes yearly.

> The bull's back sweats blood
>
> from the whipping brush, gnats gather
> to a gold haze in the fading light, cobwebs
> glitter like gilt threads, his hands
> wear the bull's horns to a shine. This

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Smith—what could he know? Now
only the ghost of a wind whispers
where no trees stand, snowplows
scrape sparks from the roads

where he rode hellbent.
His graveyard flashes with neon flowers.
We witness and wait.
His will be.
. . . .
His ride done and the last sun touching
the woman's white skirt, he swings down,

embraces her, says, perhaps:
This is our land. The forest
falls into darkness around them, the bull
drops his head to the wet grass. Time leafs

and leaves them, shadows in a clearing,
forever: the woman, the rider
whose arm she holds, the sons
who will descend here,

and the bull, whose spirit is metal,
who now stares at the traffic below him,
these cars that climb the hill like deer,
trucks that lurch his wilderness like bear.

Elsewhere in his memoir, William Heyen explains that he favors "the poem with an edge of rage." This is an unimprovable definition of the poems which Philip Levine has, for fifteen years, been writing. And all of them, to speak figuratively, are enfolded, transfigured and given visionary permanence in the grinding resignation that actuates every embittered line of "Ashes" (the title poem of a new selection[10] authorized by the poet himself)!

Soon the darkness will fall on all
the tired bodies of those who have
torn our living from the silent earth,
and they can sleep and dream of sleep
without end, but before first light
bloodies the sky opening in the east
they will have risen one by one
and dressed in clothes still hot
and damp. Before I waken they are
already bruised by the first hours

[10]ASHES, Poems New and Old, by *Philip Levine.* Atheneum $4.95; 7 YEARS FROM SOMEWHERE, by *Philip Levine.* Atheneum. $4.95.

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of the new sun. The same men
who were never boys, the same women
their faces gone gray with anger,
and the children who will say nothing.
Do you want the earth to be heaven?
Then pray, go down on your knees
as though a king stood before you,
and pray to become all you'll
never be, a drop of sea water,
a small hurtling flame across the sky,
a fine flake of dust that moves
at evening like smoke at great height
above the earth and sees it all.

From these pages the most lambent poems, and all those in his new collection, *7 Years From Somewhere,* affirm the miracle I had never expected to witness: the fist, unclenching. Levine employs the very image: " . . . It opens and is no longer./ Bud of anger, kinked/ tendril of my life, here/ in the forged morning/ fill with anything—water,/ light, blood—but fill."

Levine has by no means forsworn the resentments of a lifetime or consented to the amenities of social meliorism. Self-styled an anarchist, Levine has never in his verse acknowledged the claim of any society save that of the bluecollar dispossessed, the marginal or the crunched for whom he has elected to be the evangelist and spokesman. His passionate implication that the cause of suffering is exploitation has at last been modified by the revelation that the cause of suffering may also be ignorance, the failure to understand, until time and the chemistry of defeat bring it home to the heart that the gift of life itself and the unbelievable prospect of its extinction is even more compelling than the injustice of men, the indifference of the gods and the futility of personal umbrage. Nearly every poem in these two collections vibrates with the insistent theme of *homecoming,* of illumination postponed and tardily recognized, of a passionate desire to be reborn and this time to comprehend why, this time to "love / his life because it is like no other."

Let me begin again as a speck
of dust caught in the night winds
sweeping out to sea. Let me begin
this time knowing the world is
salt water and dark clouds, the world
is grinding and sighing all night, and dawn
comes slowly and changes nothing.
"Let Me Begin Again"

"I'm not much interested in language," Levine has surprisingly asserted. "In my ideal poem, no words are noticed. You look through them into a vision of . . . just see the people, the place. Now obviously I'm never

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going to write my ideal poem. . . . "[11] From that standpoint he has already written many. His arrangement of them on the page tends to disguise the fact that he typically speaks in a linkage of long, periodic sentence units, unimpeded by poetic locutions. When moved to do so, he composes the voiceless, architectural lyric as well as anyone—a superb example is his short monument to stubborn resurrections, "How Much Earth" (in the *Ashes* volume), but his most persuasive mode is the personal thrust of discourse addressed, as in my first quotation above, to Others, or, as in these lines from "Dark Head," to Another—

Today
I shall be gone and you
will be alone again. Today
or tomorrow I shall be fire,
then ashes, then a hint
of something animal
moving out of the corners
of the wind, and then at last
I shall be nothing, not
even the echo of someone's
voice, and then I'll be
ourselves once more,
This world, opening
in each eye and damp fist
for those who would have her.

Or, in this to himself—which, for me, is not only "The Last Step" but something very close to the last word.

I thought the rain was far off
under another sky. I thought
that to become a man I
had only to wait, and the years,
gathering slowly, would take me there.

They took me somewhere else.
The twisted fig tree, the almond,
not yet white crowned, the slow
tendrils of grape reaching
into the sky are companions
for a time, but nothing goes
the whole way. Not even the snail
smeared to death on a flat rock
or the tiny sparrow fallen from
the nest and flaring the yellow grass.
The last step, like an entrance,
is alone, in darkness, and without song.

[11] *An Interview with Philip Levine* conducted by Calvin Bedient. *Parnassus: Poetry in Review,* Spring-Summer 1978, pp. 40-51. This was a fruitful occasion because Mr. Bedient asked the right questions.

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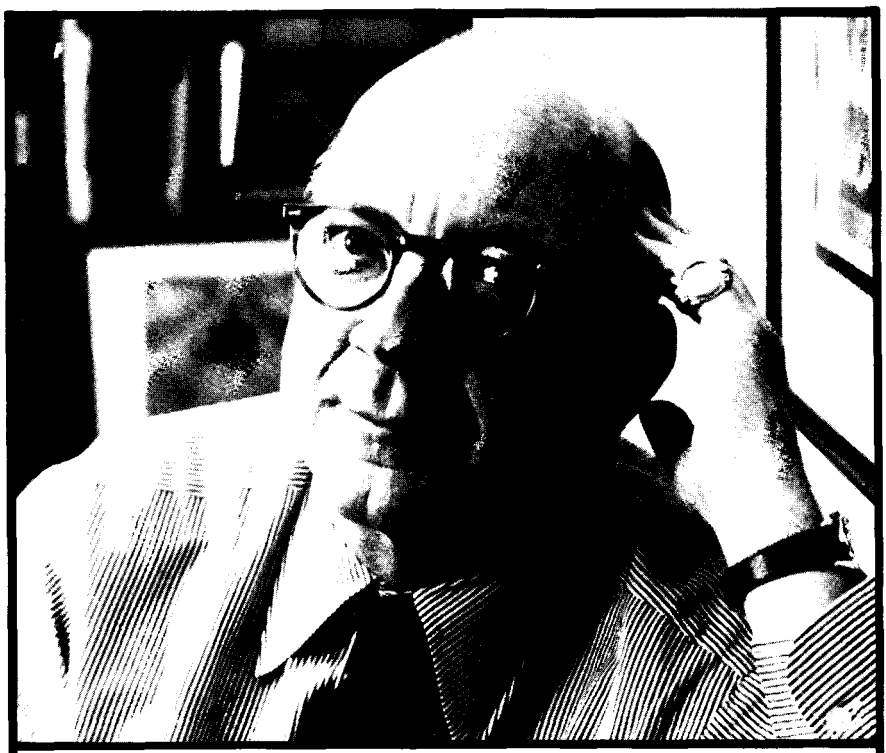

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THE AUTOMOBILE AND AMERICAN CULTURE

GUEST EDITOR: DAVID L. LEWIS
AUTHOR OF *THE PUBLIC IMAGE OF HENRY FORD*

ESSAYS, INTERVIEWS, MEMOIRS, FICTION, POETRY
AND GRAPHIC WORKS MUST BE SUBMITTED TO THE MQR OFFICE BY

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